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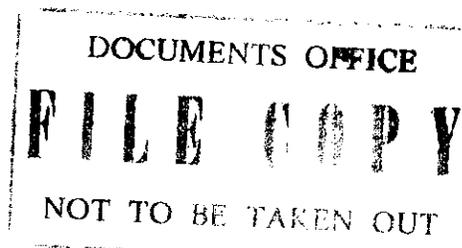
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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Fourth Meeting of the Committee on
Development Information (CODI-IV)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
23 – 28 April 2005



**Report on ECA's activities in the area of ICT and Libraries in development
for the year 2003-2005 and the presentation of the 2006-2007 work
programme**



Section 1

Activities in the area of information and communication technologies 2004-2005 (Highlighting the implementation of CODI III recommendations)

The Third Meeting of the Committee on Development Information (CODI) on the theme "Information and Governance" was held at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa, from 12 to 15 May 2003, with pre-meeting events from 10 to 11 May 2003 and post-meeting events from 16 to 17 May 2003.

The Subcommittee on ICT and Library met from 12 to 15 May 2003. Meetings of the African Stakeholders Network (ASN), United Nations ICT Task Force, African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN) Advisory Committee, and workshops on technical aspects of building digital libraries and information networks and open source for improved public administration in Africa were held from 10 to 11 May 2003. Various reports were presented, including "The African Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC), on the implementation of the AISI" and a report on recommendations from CODI II.

A media forum on the Information Society was held from 16 to 17 May 2003. In collaboration with the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) secretariat, GKP Africa Day presented various ICT initiatives and activities in the area of governance. Documents received for consideration included:

- Summary of the AISI electronic discussion on ICT and governance;
- "Preliminary reflection to launch an African Action Plan on E-governance";
- "E-strategies in Africa: National, Sectoral and Regional ICT Policies, Plans and Strategies";
- "Genre et gouvernance des processus de TIC, Dakar, Sénégal", by Marie-Helene Mottin Sylla;
- "E-Pol-Net: Digital Opportunities for Africa", by Raymond Lepage & Richard Bourassa; and
- "Report on Indicators of Information and Communications Technologies and the Impact of Information and Communication Technology at the Country Level".

Additional sessions were held on ICT and governance and Information and knowledge development, where the following documents were presented:

- "The value of library services in development";
- "The Information Technology Centre for Africa"; and
- "Report on ECA activities in the area of information and communication technologies, information systems and libraries in 2002-2003 and work programme for the biennium 2004-2005"

The Sub-committee concluded the meeting by recommending that ECA should undertake activities and address issues arising from the Third Meeting of the Committee on Development Information. These recommendations and related actions are presented here.

1. Accelerating the process of the formulation, development and implementation of National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans

The process of development of NICI plans took an upswing following CODI III, especially with the preparation by countries for the Geneva Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) that took place in Geneva, Switzerland from 12 – 15 December 2003. Since CODI III, six countries¹ have completed their policy development process while another six have commenced. At present, a total of fifteen countries² are under various stages of the policy development process.

In order to take stock of best practices and lessons learnt in the formulation and implementation processes of e-strategies, ECA organized a NICI review workshop from 19 to 20 February 2004, attended by national NICI focal points. The workshop reviewed the NICI methodology used in each country through country reports, identified lessons learnt and discussed approaches to implementation and how the policy-making process can be enhanced in the future. An e-strategies pre-conference workshop was also held during the second African regional conference of the WSIS. The national, sectoral, regional and local e-strategy development processes were examined in depth during the workshop.

ECA with its partners is working towards the implementation of NICI plans in the form of development of sectoral sub-regional policies both at the country and regional levels. E-Government projects have been launched in Ghana, Rwanda and the East African Community (EAC). COMESA's e-strategy is almost completed. A health and ICT policy have been prepared and reviewed by stakeholders in Uganda. A legal framework for e-commerce is being developed for the ECOWAS region.

2. “Sub-regional offices should increase their involvement in the NICI development processes, particularly in the area of e-governance.”

ECA sub-regional offices have increased their involvement in the NICI development processes. In the area of e-governance, the sub-regional offices have been closely involved in the countries and regions where e-government strategy developments are taking place. The participation of the East African sub-regional office in the launching workshop of the EAC e-government policy development process is a case in point. The office is also facilitating the implementation of Rwanda's e-Government strategy.

The West African sub-regional office is involved in activities being undertaken with ECOWAS and the Central African sub-regional office has been active in the Cameroon NICI process. The North African sub-regional office, along with the Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA) was instrumental in preparing the ECA-UNDP workshop on the use of ICT as a tool to boost trade exchanges within the region.

3. Promotion of ICT networks for African parliamentarians to help increase their capacity to promote the development of e-governance at the parliamentary level and enhance the participation of members of parliaments in the formulation and implementation of national ICT policies.

¹ Comoros, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali and Niger.

² Angola, Botswana, Chad, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In line with the recommendations of CODI III, a Tanzania parliamentary ICT network for development was launched. The event was also attended by MPs from other East African countries. This resulted in a decision to launch similar networks in Uganda and Kenya.

As part of a multi-stakeholder partnership forum, a parliamentary stakeholders' forum was held during the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference on WSIS that took place in Accra on 28 January to 4 February 2005. This was part of the multi stakeholder partnership forum during the same conference.

ECA continued to train parliamentarians in ICT4D issues through its Information Technology Center for Africa (ITCA). In addition to the forty MPs from Ethiopia who were on training during CODI III, an additional training of forty more took place from May to July 2004.

4. "Promotion of participatory approaches"

CODI requested that the Bamako Bureau on Africa's preparation for WSIS take into account civil society and women's participation, including other major concerns and ensure that Africa has a common platform in the WSIS process. In coordinating Africa's participation in WSIS, ECA has worked with the Bamako Bureau members to ensure the effective participation of civil society organizations in the process. The African civil society was active and vocal during the first phase of WSIS and continues to actively participate in the process leading to the second phase. In the segment "A Road Map from Accra to Tunis", the African Civil Society plans to organize five sub-regional workshops: one each for East, North, South, West and Central Africa before the second phase of the Summit to be held in Tunis. The sub-regional workshops are expected to share and exchange information and lessons learnt on country best practices. This information will form the basis for setting up the African Civil Society village, which will be an important part of the ICT4ALL platform in Tunis.

The media is another stakeholder group that has increased participation in Information Society issues since CODI III. As a result of the AISI Media Awards launched during CODI III, ECA has seen increased informed coverage on Information Society and ICT4-D issues in Africa as part of its Outreach and Communication Programme. The second AISI media awards ceremony took place in September 2004 in South Africa during the Highway Africa Conference. The third awards series has been announced and ECA is receiving entries.

Follow-up activities were set in motion as follows:

- Media awardees are now members of an AISI Media discussion list; launched by ECA for media to discuss Information Society related issues.
- Members of the discussion list were part of the WSIS Agenda Newspaper Team, produced during the African regional preparatory conference on WSIS in Accra.
- ECA launched African Media and ICT4D: Documentary Evidence, a baseline study on the state of media reporting on ICT and information society issues in Africa. The study focused on nine African countries³. The launch took place during the first phase of WSIS in December 2003, in Geneva.

Involvement of the African academia on Information Society issues commenced right after CODI III in June 2003 during a retreat on "Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative: What Role for Africa's Academic Community?" The launching of the African Academia Research Network (ARN) by ECA and the Ford Foundation in December 2003 in Geneva during the first WSIS followed this. The aim of the

³ Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal.

network is to build research capacity of Academia on key policy issues with respect to African needs and strengthening scholarship in various areas that are of significant importance to countries.

The network held its first meeting in June 2004 in Addis Ababa where it came up with four thematic research topics⁴ that could enhance the development of the African Information Society. The working groups established under each one of the thematic topics are expected to present their findings during the second phase of WSIS in Tunis in November 2005.

ECA organized a forum for African Engineers on October 14, 2003 under the theme “The African Engineers Day: Contribution of African Engineers to the Information Society” during the World Engineering Congress took place in Tunis, Tunisia from 14 – 16 October 2003.

A two-week telemedicine training programme for over twenty Ethiopian medical doctors drawn from ten hospitals in Addis Ababa and regional towns took place in August 2004. The training was undertaken as part of a telemedicine pilot project in Ethiopia in which ECA is collaborating with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), UNESCO, Ethiopia’s Ministry of Health, Ethiopian Telecom Corporation (ETC), and the Addis Ababa University - Faculty of Medicine.

ECA’s efforts to promote participatory approaches were highlighted during the WSIS Africa regional preparatory conference that took place in Accra. A multi-stakeholders partnership (MSP) session brought together Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) members, representatives of governments, regional organisations, bilateral and multilateral development partners, civil society, youth, parliamentarians, academia, women and the private sector to exchange views on the concept of multi-stakeholder partnerships in the African context. Discussions focused on overcoming the challenges of implementing the WSIS Action Plan in the context of ICT4D initiatives. MSP was recognised as a means to foster an inclusive Information Society in Africa.

5. Support member States in mainstreaming gender issues in ICT policies and plans

ECA organized a workshop along with the UN Division for the Advancement of women (DAW) from 10 to 14 January 2005 to build the institutional capacity of information managers working for National Machineries for the Empowerment of Women. The aim of the National Machineries is to support gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the development frameworks of member States as outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

A gender forum was also held during the Accra WSIS conference with the main objective of coming up with recommendations for mainstreaming gender in Africa’s Information Society development. Emphasis was made on defining the role of women entrepreneurs in the process. The recommendations from the workshop were incorporated in the Accra Commitments for Tunis 2005.

⁴ The five thematic research networks are: Creating the enabling environment, The Industrialization of ICTs in Africa, Measuring the impact of the African information society, and African languages and content development in the cyberspace.

6. ePol-NET activities should be included and linked to the AISI Outreach Programme and other African-based ICT initiatives, such as IMPACT Africa that can strengthen information and knowledge sharing among member States

ePol-NET activities in Africa were carried out during this period in the framework of implementing the African Information Society Initiative (AISI). These include:

- An assessment and survey to identify the e-strategy needs in African countries;
- Development of web resources;
- Creation of an ePol-NET experts database as well as an expert-country matrix of potential experts; and
- Engaging in activities in response to requests from member States and regional organizations.

The outreach included joint exhibitions by ECA/AISI, ePol-NET and the Canadian ePolicy Resource Centre (CePRC) during the first phase of the WSIS in Geneva (December 2003), the ITU Telecom Africa 2004 in Cairo (May 2004), the fourth African Development Forum (ADF IV) in Addis Ababa (October 2004) and the Africa WSIS Conference in Accra (January – February 2005).

As a result of the outreach activities, ePol-NET continues to receive requests for assistance in the development of e-strategies. So far, requests from Lesotho, Uganda, Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, Morocco, Burkina Faso, Gambia and Niger have been received. Additional requests have been received from Mapping Malaria risk in Africa (MARA), African Training and Research Centre in Administration for Development (CAFRAD), African Development Bank (ADB) and Center of Specialisation in Public Administration and Management (CESPAM) in the SADC region. Activities that have materialized out of these requests include the COMESA and EAC e-government policy development processes and the Uganda ICT and health policy development process. As the regional ePol-NET node, ECA has been developing web resources for the ePolAfrica website to serve as a resource for African countries on strategies and policies on the Information Society with emphasis on e-commerce, e-government and e-health.

7. Putting in place a mechanism to measure the progress in the usage of ICTs.

7.1 In collaboration with member States, develop gender indicators in ICTs and also aggregate data within the framework of SCAN-ICT

ECA, in collaboration with IDRC held a workshop to conclude the first phase of the SCAN-ICT project from 17 to 18 February 2004 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The workshop brought together ICT practitioners and statisticians to reflect on the first phase of Scan-ICT, which is aimed at building Africa's capacity to gather information and data needed to support ICT investments. The workshop reviewed the country reports and the methodology used in each country. Lessons learnt were identified and discussions were held on approaches to mainstreaming SCAN-ICT into decision-making processes, including the national e-strategy (NICI) development process and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The absence of gender indicators in the SCAN methodology was noted and a recommendation was made to reverse this exclusion in subsequent SCAN-ICT activities.

Further, during the workshop on the institutional capacity of information managers working for National Machineries for the Empowerment of Women (refer to resolution number 5 above), it was noted that National Machineries have a key role to play to ensure that gender perspectives are taken into account in ICT analyses such as SCAN-ICT.

The Regional Workshop on ICT Indicators held in Gaborone, Botswana from 26 to 29 October 2004 also discussed the issue of indicators. A gender dimension to some of the ICT data was included. Further discussions on this issue resulted in concrete decisions during the “Evaluation of the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action & Information Society Indicators” workshop in the African Preparatory Conference for the WSIS that took place in Accra in 2005.

7.2 Together with partners, extend the SCAN-ICT project to include other African countries

During the Regional Workshop on ICT Indicators held in Gaborone, Botswana from 26 to 29 October 2004, the second phase of the SCAN-ICT project was launched. Nine new countries were selected for the second phase of the SCAN ICT project. These are Botswana, Gambia, Mauritius, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Tunisia. Activities have started in these countries.

7.3 Create performance indicators for the implementation of AISI

During the review of the first phase of the SCAN-ICT project in February 2004 and the subsequent launching the second phase in October 2004, an evaluation of the SCAN-ICT indicators was conducted. With respect to ECA’s monitoring and evaluation of the Information Society, the SCAN-ICT project has been modeled by other UN Regional Commissions as a follow up to the WSIS Plan of Action. Together with ITU and other partners, steps have been taken to consolidate Africa’s inputs to the internationally agreed Information Society indicators, which reflect the continent’s needs and aspirations.

8. Improved content creation and assistance towards enabling African languages

ECA launched the Academia Research Network (ARN) for the Information Society in Geneva during the first phase of WSIS in December 2003. ARN provides a space for a select group of leading African academics and researchers to reflect on key research questions and activities in ICTs, policy and society. Subsequent meetings of the network have resulted in the inclusion of Africa Language and content development in cyberspace as a key research topic. Ten participants drawn from ECA, Cameroon, Mali, Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania, and three observers discussed problems related to the use of African languages in cyberspace. The challenges were debated, and grouped into three categories: technical, social, and political. According to the participants, the third category (political) was the most compelling. It was agreed that all the research would be coordinated by ACALAN (FULL?) under two main institutional bodies, which are ECA and AU. It is to be recalled that the issue of African languages in the Information Society dates back to the first African preparatory conference of the WSIS (Bamako 2002). The issue was discussed in a pre-conference workshop and was part of the Bamako 2002 resolutions.

8.1 With support of its member States, develop Africa-wide sectoral portals.

ECA's ITCA has been developing sectoral portals on good governance, regional Integration, health and a database of African experts and the Diaspora.

8.2 Together with its partners support the development of local African languages for content creation through the effective appropriation of open source software for utilization in the governance process and to enable citizens to gain access to ICTs in general.

ECA is carrying out Research and Development (R&D) activities under its VarsityNet programme. The Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) is implementing projects supported by the Ford Foundation and the Addis Ababa University (AAU). IUCEA is piloting the development of a web and database application while AAU is designing a web based, multilingual and multi-alphabet document exchange platform for use by the public and private sectors. For the AAU team, the process has also to build the capacity of post-graduate students at Addis Ababa University and has created greater awareness on the utilization and localization of Open Source Software (OSS).

9. Enhanced partnerships and collaboration

9.1 Together with member States, establish national committees on NICIs, NEPAD and WSIS

A national committee composed of stakeholders leads the NICI process in each country. The stakeholders are selected from a cross section of the society, including governments, civil society, private sector and academia. ECA has also worked with member States to establish national committees in preparation for WSIS. This has resulted in the high-level involvement of African countries in the WSIS process. ECA has also held discussions with the African Union and the NEPAD e-Africa Commission on the participation of African countries in the WSIS process. A highlight of the partnership is the active participation of the two in the preparations of the 2005 WSIS African regional conference and its deliberations.

ECA's collaboration with partners in implementing the AISI continued under the PICTA framework. Annual PICTA meetings were held in Tunisia (October 2003) and Mauritius (September 2004.)

9.2 Operationalize AVLIN and intensify the participation of ATAC and civil society for providing assistance to member States

In operationalizing AVLIN, new marketing and promotional strategies have been put in place to extend the benefits of the network to strategic partners. ECA is now producing value-added informational materials targeted at policy makers, researchers, economists and similar groups. The Library's information portal manages knowledge interfaces for both current and potential members of AVLIN. AVLIN has also established an online librarians' discussion forum to advocate and discuss common issues relating to the development and management of library and information services in Africa.

AVLIN members are participating in the Africa Language and content development in the cyberspace working group of the Academia Research Network (ARN). They also participated

in the African languages and Open source software: Creativity in the service of African renaissance pre-conference workshop of the Africa regional conference of the WSIS. Members of ATAC and the African civil society have been involved in the different Information Society activities such as the NICI development process and Africa's participation in WSIS. In addition, the current ATAC members are proposing recommendations for ECA on the emerging Information Economy and multi-stakeholders partnership models to support it.

9.3 In collaboration with partners, provide assistance to existing information and knowledge networks among different subregions, taking into consideration geography and balance

ECA has been providing assistance to different stakeholders to establish an ICT4D network. These include academia, parliamentarians, civil society, gender, Diaspora, private sector, media, African engineers and the youth. The assistance ranges from advisory services to the groups for the establishment of a forum (physical and virtual) where members can exchange views.

The Academia Research Network (ARN) is an example of such collaboration. ARN teams have conducted three Sub-regional Thematic Meetings in August and September 2004 since their launch earlier in the year. These are:

- The industrialisation of ICTs in Africa, 14 -15 August 2004, Maputo, Mozambique,
- African languages and content development in the cyberspace, 22 - 26 September 2004, Bamako, Mali, and
- Creating the Enabling Environment, September 2004, Dakar, Senegal.

9.4 Together with GKP, should address the need for wider use of radio in Africa through CSOs in order to reach the grassroots

ECA produced the AISI Radio Series based on its Harnessing ICTs for development programme. The Radio Series is aimed at creating greater awareness on the Information Society; serving as a tool for media practitioners, especially radio broadcasters to engage various groups in debating the role of ICTs in the development process. The first series, Dialogue on Digital Dividends in Africa is the Bronze winner of the New York festivals 2003 Radio Awards. Additional programmes in the series include a French programme .The English version covered Ghana, Mali and Uganda while the French version covered Benin and Senegal. The series was disseminated through Radio Nederlands' affiliate stations such as World Radio Network (WRN) broadcast worldwide with specific feeds to National Public Radio (NPR) in North America, SAfm, South Africa, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and the Australia Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). In addition, the Radio Series have been distributed to community radio stations in Africa using the AMARC network.

9.5 The African Stakeholders Network (ASN) should initiate ICT activities in member States with support from ECA

ASN, in line with the global UN-ICT Task Force (TF), is involved in coming up with an African consensus on Internet Governance. To this effect, an online discussion on the issue was held among African stakeholders. The outcomes have been submitted to the ongoing global debate on Internet Governance as part of the WSIS process.

10. Enhanced role of libraries

ECA intensified efforts to fulfil its mandate to provide library and technical information services to the secretariat and member States through acquisition, processing and dissemination of relevant print and electronic resources. To this end, it participated in the UN system-wide consortium on acquisition of electronic information resources and developed enhanced bibliographic information retrieval services.

ECA also produced and disseminated several socio-economic information sources for use by African researchers and policymakers in member States and the Secretariat in general during the period. These include: *African Development Topics* and *Journal Contents*. Several outputs were consolidated into *African Development Topics*, which is now available in both print and CD-Rom. These include: *Africa Index*, *ECA-in-Print*, *New Acquisitions*, and *Index to African Official Publications*.

ECA continued to implement its fully integrated library information system by making available online references through its information portal to materials that were previously only available in print format. This has helped to strengthen its capacity for policy analysis and provide an integrated socio-economic information service for the region. This has resulted in the following new and improved services to the Secretariat and member States:

- Enhanced professionalism in the delivery of library and information services, by incorporating standard professional tools and processes, for example, authority control and standard metadata formats;
- Enhanced communication and dissemination of ECA outputs through the Internet and other channels; and
- Compatibility with ECA and UN standard technology architecture, thereby facilitating integration and interfacing with other ECA information services, and the wider UN system.

ECA has taken concrete steps to improve its activities in the area of knowledge and information sharing and access to its users. It plays an active role in the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of UN Libraries and the UN-system Libraries' Knowledge Sharing and Information Network to help coordinate and harmonize the services each library offers to users. For example, the Library is chairing the Information management skills and learning working group, which promotes training and information capacity building skills among UN staff. It co-hosted a workshop on depository libraries, held in Addis Ababa, with the Dag Hammarskjold Library of UNHQ, and held its own training workshop (*KnowledgeWorks I*) in order to enhance the research capacities of reference and research staff from ECA and the SROs. As a member of the IFLA Africa Section, it also collaborates closely with regional initiatives.

11. Promotion of free and open source software

11.1 Together with partners and member States establish an inter-African collaboration and networking mechanism to promote open source software and a portal site on success stories

ECA is working with partners such as the OIF to promote the use of open source software in the continent. These include active involvement in organizing the first African Conference on

the Digital Commons in January 2004 and including the presentation of the open source perspective through the Free Software and Open Source Foundation for Africa (FOSSFA) during various discussions on the Information Society.

ECA collaborated with UNCTAD in the Expert Meeting on Free and Open Source Software, held from 22 to 24 September 2004 in Geneva.

African languages and Open Source Software: Creativity in the Service of African Renaissance was one of the pre-conference workshops during the Africa regional preparatory conference of the WSIS. The workshop ended with a way forward to ensure an effective and sustainable presence of African languages in cyberspace.

11.2 Develop capacity-building programmes on open source software utilization for the development of the ICT industry in Africa

Under the VarsityNet component of the ALN, the Addis Ababa University and the Inter University Council of East Africa are working on OSS based solutions for e-government and African Language development. AAU's R&D project focuses on the use of an African language in enabling greater access by citizens to government services at a grassroots level. The IUCEA project aims to contribute to improving efficiency and effectiveness in managing data and information within the IUCEA administration. In addition ECA held several workshops on OSS in collaboration with La Francophonie and the Free and Open Source Software Association of Africa (FOSFA).

12. Facilitating the public-private partnership (PPP)

12.1 Establish a framework for public-private partnership (PPP) for Africa in the use of ICT-enabled equitable development

ECA organized two pre-conference workshops on public-private partnership (PPP) during the second African Regional Conference for the Information Society held in Accra in January – February 2005. These are: Investing in Africa's Information Society: The View of Business and Private Sector implementing an inclusive Information Society in Africa. The outcomes from these workshops have paved the way for the participation of Africa's private sector in Information Society issues. The Multi-Stakeholder Partnership (MSP) Forum held during the same conference served as a basis for this.

13. Rationalization of initiatives

13.1 Promote and coordinate ICT initiatives to narrow the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world with the objective of establishing a digital solidarity fund for Africa

ECA has spearheaded Africa's participation in the Information Society through the implementation of the AISI. It has also been involved in organizing Africa's participation in the WSIS process that commenced in May 2002 at Bamako, Mali. The WSIS Africa Regional preparatory conference held from 2 to 4 February 2005 in Accra, Ghana under the theme "Access: Africa's key to an inclusive Information Society." resulted in a document entitled "Accra Commitments for WSIS Tunis 2005". The document articulates Africa's position

with regard to the key issues of the WSIS process. The document outlines the key principles, development orientations, resource mobilization including human resources, international cooperation, and operational aspects including the way to Tunis 2005, general implementation strategies, financing mechanisms, internet governance, partnership and the way ahead: beyond Tunis 2005. It is also worth noting that the proposed Digital Solidarity Fund is one of the issues of the WSIS that was endorsed during the recent second preparatory meeting of the WSIS.

Section II

The work programme for the biennium 2006-7 of the Harnessing Information for Development Sub-Programme

The overall objective of the sub-programme is to further strengthen an African Information Society that better addresses the continent's development challenges.

1. Main activities undertaken over the recent past

It is widely recognized that without embracing ICTs, the development gap between Africa and the rest of the world will grow even bigger. Information and knowledge have increasingly become essential resources in the global networked economy. Africa can exploit these technologies to become fully integrated into the global economy and accelerate socio-economic development.

The work programme of Development Information Services Division (DISD) is composed of three major themes: Harnessing information technology for development - implementing African Information Society Initiative (AISI); Improving access to information and knowledge through enhanced library services; and Strengthening geo-information systems for sustainable development.

AISI is the result of a vision shared by African policymakers in the quest to bridge the digital divide on the continent. Many initiatives were launched in the first African Development Forum (ADF) in 1999 on "Africa's Information Society." Driven by critical development imperatives, AISI focuses on priority strategies, programmes and projects, which can help in building African information societies.

AISI is also the framework for coordinating the support that UN agencies provide to NEPAD, which at the continental level has identified ICT-related projects and initiatives to speed up sub-regional and regional connectivity and inter-connectivity plans. NEPAD aims to strengthen the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) whose role should be to coordinate national efforts and harmonize national regulatory frameworks across the sub-regions.

A key component of the AISI is the development of national e-strategies, known as the NICI Plans. ECA worked with countries to introduce policies and strategies that deploy, harness and exploit ICTs for socio-economic development at the local, national and sub-regional levels; and to enable citizens' access to affordable telephones, broadcasting, computers and Internet services. For this to happen, countries need to adopt concrete measures that include developing sound regulatory frameworks and building human resource capacity.

ECA has been assisting member States in their endeavors to initiate, formulate and implement national e-strategies to achieve development goals. The success is evident in that the number of countries with ICT policies increased from 13 in 2000 to 16 in 2002, while countries in the process of developing a policy jumped from 10 in 2000 to 21 in 2002. Some

of the NICI countries have also embarked on the formulation and implementation of Sectoral Information and Communication Infrastructure (SICI) policies and plans.

Another key component of AISI is the Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA), an ICT-focused exhibition and learning centre at ECA. On-site workshops and seminars are provided to conference delegates and policymakers to promote awareness of the importance of ICT for economic growth and competitiveness. Overall, a significant number of countries have benefited from training (e.g., African women from 38 countries).

AISI also promotes networking with partners, including UN substantive organs and agencies, the Partners for Information and Communication Technologies for Africa (PICTA), the UN ICT Task Force, all relevant digital opportunity initiatives and specialized institutions working in the field of ICTs.

Furthermore, AISI is the umbrella under which various outreach products and services to promote the Information Society development in Africa are launched. For instance, the AISI radio series were produced to enhance people's understanding of the role and impact of ICTs and raise questions on the issues of access and disparities in the African Information Society. While one of the programmes provides an overview of the Information Society in Africa, the other three are based on the state of ICTs in Ghana, Mali and Uganda. The series won the internationally recognized New York Festival 2003 Radio Awards.

ECA has revamped its library services from a largely in-house service to a regional centre for socio-economic information and knowledge exchange. The ECA organized workshops and developed a series of new products to foster its services. Through the African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN), the sub-programme has facilitated the access of its members to a wide range of information resources. ECA's activities have also contributed to assist in building capacity and standardizing virtual library systems. For example, since 2002, the Library has been collaborating with other UN system libraries to better coordinate library services across the UN system. Furthermore, the *Knowledge Works I*, the first in a series of training workshops that will focus on content management, information literacy and general research skills, and the training manual on *Research Information and Knowledge Services* equip ECA staff with advanced information retrieval and organization skills necessary for efficient and effective research.

2. Outcomes, impact of these activities and continuing challenges for the near future

Since the inception of AISI, the sub-programme made relentless efforts to raise awareness on Africa's Information Society, Africa's participation in the global Information Economy and its translation at the national level.

The central role e-strategies played was affirmed during WSIS, held in Geneva in December 2003. One of the actions recommended in the Plan of Action encourages all the member States to initiate the process by 2005. ECA led the African participation through AISI, which was recognized as one of the most successful ICT initiatives. It was evident in the fact that an ECA's initiative, SCAN-ICT, was modeled as a basis to develop harmonized Information Society indicators at the global level.

The major challenges continue to be further consolidation of NICI implementation efforts at the local, national and sub-regional levels, while building capacity among various key stakeholders and establishing their networks at the regional level. Most of the NICI countries have already started the implementation process, but some countries requested ECA's support to translate the national policies into sectoral policies and build institutional and individual

capacity to carry out the activities. How to bring the benefits to the local level will pose the next challenge in the process.

There is also the need to monitor and evaluate NICI implementation. Some of the NICI countries will complete their first 5-year plans in 2004 and 2005. The sub-programme should be at the forefront of assisting member States to undertake analysis on the first phase of NICI policies, emerging trends and major bottlenecks, based on the experience accumulated through the SCAN-ICT project. This should be coupled with the convergence of SCAN-ICT and the global efforts to enable harmonized and standardized data collection and analysis at the national, regional and global levels, so as to monitor and assess the development of the Information Society.

Another challenge is how to strengthen linkages between NICI efforts and the overall national development frameworks, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The evidence of ICT contributions to socio-economic development in general and poverty reduction in particular has been slowly emerging in various disciplines. The sub-programme anticipates that the next challenge will be the consolidation of the analytical work in the context of Africa, strengthening of pro-poor growth components of NICI policies and plans and mainstreaming of ICT for Development into PRSPs and other efforts aimed at achieving the MDGs.

3. Work Priorities for the biennium 2006 – 2007

The strategy for the next biennium is informed by the deliberations of the Committee on Development Information (CODI III) and the WSIS Plan of Action and will focus on the following priority areas:

(a) Providing assistance to member States to strengthen conditions for a sustainable African information society; and providing support in research on emerging information-related issues, which will have significant impact on the course of development in Africa.

(b) Strengthening capacity in the use of information and knowledge for development, including evaluation and benchmarking to monitor progress and identify gaps to be addressed to ensure a balanced and sustainable growth of the African Information Society. The activities will also focus on ICT and the development of library services.

(c) Supporting policy dialogue for sharing experiences, best practices on policies and strategies for fostering the Information Society and the application of information and communications technology in key social and economic sectors, such as health and education, especially for the empowerment of marginalized groups.

The above activities will be supported by the analytical work of the sub-programme in the form of publications, outreach materials and online discussion lists, which will strengthen networks among various stakeholders.

The sub-programme will be implemented in close collaboration with other organizations within the UN system as well as other key stakeholders, including civil society, private sector, media, academia, and women and youth organizations. Such collaboration will ensure dialogue and broad consultation for achieving an inclusive Information Society in Africa. Existing partnership and coordination mechanisms, such as with the RECs in the respective sub-regions will also be strengthened.

Efforts will also be geared towards addressing key and emerging Information Society issues, such as financing the NICI process, building the implementation capacity of relevant

institutions and stakeholders and harmonizing regulatory and legal frameworks. This will involve the RECs and integrate NEPAD's requirements. In further promoting the use of information for decision-making, ECA will continue to provide training on the use of combined statistical and spatial data with a specific application to poverty mapping and country poverty profiles. In order to empower and build local capacity to speed up the process of the implementation of NICI plans, ECA will provide regulatory and policy expertise, multimedia resources, and guidance and advisory services in support of among others, governance issues, especially in the context of the *e-Policy Resource Network (ePol-NET)* of which ECA is the African regional node.

This will be supported by analytical work by the sub-programme on good practices and lessons learned in the development and formulation of NICI policies and plans, the role of development information in the economy and geo-information in the socio-economic development. The recurrent publications will also address emerging trends and issues in the development of the Information Society as an advocate tool for member States. Some of the key challenges will be highlighted at the fifth meeting of the CODI in 2006 where various perspectives and views will be shared and consolidated. The meeting will also provide a forum where the 10 years of AISI implementation will be reviewed and assessed, while leading to the way forward.

Raising awareness will continue to be AISI's major activity. Its focus will be expanded to target a broad spectrum of stakeholders through knowledge sharing, outreach and communication. ITCA will offer on-line manuals and training for policy makers and parliamentarians and will expand on existing activities to pilot innovative applications and address major constraints and challenges in advancing Africa's Information Society. The project will provide critical information through *multimedia and touch-screen kiosks* in many local languages.

In addition, through the AVLIN project, ECA will facilitate the building of a *network of virtual libraries and specialized information centres* as a means to provide better access to African knowledge. AVLIN will provide access to e-books, policy documents, bibliographic databases, and standardize virtual library systems.

In response to existing gaps in educational curricula, their relevance to the employment market, and the resulting brain drain, ICT in support of education and research and development (R&D) is another critical area of ECA's agenda. Activities are in place in support of primary schools and job creation for out-of-school youth. Mechanisms will be developed for establishing linkages between governments, academia and the private sector and securing the commitment of the latter as an important constituency in developing and diffusing ICTs.

Finally, the sub-programme will assist member States to implement the Plan of Action of WSIS II with the *WSIS Implementation Guidebook and parliamentary documentation: Follow up on WSIS*.

4. Expected benefits to member States in the longer term

The planned activities during the biennium 2006-2007 will be critical to strengthening institutional and individual capacity among key stakeholders to build sustainable and balanced Information Society at the national and regional level. The capacity will also enable member States to actively participate in the global decision-making processes and reflect Africa's concerns and perspectives in their outcomes.