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Second Meeting of the Committee
on Development Information (CODI)

Addis Ababa (Ethiopia),
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Report of the African
Technical Advisory Committee
on the African Information Society Initiative (AISI)

AFRICAN TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ATAC)/MEETING ON AFRICA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DOT FORCE

INTRODUCTION

1.   The African Information Society Initiative (AISI) is a mission statement for Africa's quest to bridge the digital divide between the continent and the rest of the world, and to speed the continent and the rest of the world , and to speed the continent's entry into the Information age. Based on ECA resolution and instituting mechanism that could monitor and evaluate the progress and results of AISI, members of ATAC were appointed. The first meeting of ATAC I was held in October 1997 and the second took place in 1998. ATAC II is currently meeting for the first time since new members were appointed.

Welcome

2.   Welcoming remarks by Nino Fluck, ECA on behalf of the DISD Director, Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, who was delayed arriving into the country. When Ms. Bounemra joined the meeting she also gave some welcoming remarks on ATAC II and emphasised the role of ATAC as the African vision guiding the AISI, and contextualised the role of the advisory group within the framework of AISI, its objectives and terms of reference.

Introductions

3.   Participants introduced themselves.

Election of Officers

4.   The ATAC meeting elected the following officers:
                Chairperson: Prof. Mamadou Gueye
                Vice-chairperson: Ms Heba Ramzy
                Rapporteur: Ms. Aida Opoku-Mensah

Participation

5.   The ATAC meeting held on Thursday 10th May 2001 had in attendance 9 ATAC members, 2 observes and staff members of the ECA secretariat led by Ms. Bounemra.

Adoption of Agenda

6.   Participants then adopted the programme agenda and proceeded with the main deliberations.

7.   The secretariat presented a document entitled 'Brainstorming session on use of AISI framework for an African position on key issues of ICTs for Africa's development', which

further contextualised the AISI, tracing its pre-formative years to the present. This helped set the tone for the ATAC meeting. Participants also made the following recommendations:

The need to customise and flag the AISI framework at non-ICT thematic events which could benefit from knowledge and information on applications.

There was a need to formulate strategies on how to proceed with the AISI and later define priorities.

There was a need to integrate all ICT initiatives on the continent under the umbrella or aegis of AISI for mainly synergistic reasons and enable effective coordination whilst avoiding duplication. Therefore, there is a need for a review o the AISI framework and its links to regional and international organisations.

The need for a portal that could serve as a clearing house or observatory on the progress made under the AISI framework.

Initiate an awareness-creating campaign to disseminate information on the importance of ICTs for the development process to member states.

There is a need for paradigm shifts with strategies formulated to enable investors, development agencies and donors come to terms with this shift, enable regional institutions rise up to championing ICT work and serving as catalysts and enablers of ICTs for development. Consequently, there is a need for promotional work to be done and a communication strategy pursued.

Further initiatives and strategies need to base themselves on the goals of COMPACT for African Recovery.

ECA needs to initiate an advocacy campaign on ICTs, especially within non-ICT circles.

There is a need to promote AISI within ECA itself and well as outside of it.

8.   There was a presentation on ADF'99 follow-up activities (with documents on four areas of sectoral applications in education, health, e-commerce and ICT policies and strategies. The presenter summarised the contents of the four documents prepared for the Post Forum Summit. Key issues from each document have been extracted and discussed. ATAC members made the following recommendations:

- Considering the fact that a lot might have happened since the documents were originally written, there is a strong need to update the contents of the documents, especially the e-commerce and policy papers. Results of recent surveys and achievements have to be included.

- After the documents are updated, they can be disseminated widely to serve African countries as background or reference materials to build national strategies and initiate programmes/activities at the country level. They were also originally intended to serve the countries in their preparatory work for the post forum summit.

- A short and precise strategy document addressing and linking all the issues in the four documents has to be prepared that will be used as guiding framework and strategy for ICTs in Africa. The document should revisit and review the activities so far and consider the roles of each stakeholder in the process of implementing the strategies and programmes.

- There is a need to strengthen institutional framework to implement and ensure the sustainability of specific programmes and activities identified in the documents.

- The issue of capacity building in ICTs has not been properly reflected in all the documents. For implementing the activities in the areas identified, each document has to elaborate concrete actions regarding capacity building, especially human resource development.

- It is very important to identify and closely work with the major stakeholders in implementing the programmes at country level. Particular emphasis should be given to advocacy role of civil society, diaspora, and private sector in implementing national strategies and policies. Ownership of processes at community level has to be encouraged to obtain better results.

- Innovative programmes, to attract funding and build competitiveness among the community in implementing result-oriented ICT programmes, should be put in place.

- There is a need to revitalise PICTA to facilitate partnership mechanisms in ICT projects in Africa. Wider participation in PICTA mechanism has to be considered.

- Considering the proliferation of donor-driven studies in Africa that result in mismatch of results, the SCAN-ICT project of ECA and IDRC has to be encouraged and start as soon as possible in order to develop common baseline on ICT indicators and activities at country level. SCAN-ICT provides the missing link between AISI framework and national strategies and plans, and activities at country level. The process has to involve as many countries as possible. Duplication of efforts has to be avoided as much as possible.

- A co-ordination mechanism through a portal or clearing house where people are informed about what is going on in each country in Africa is very important.

- There needs to be a fall-back position for the post ADF summit and follow-up should be undertaken ASAP.

9.   The ATAC meeting listened to a presentation on the African Connection (AC) project by Mr. Emmanuel OleKambainei explaining how the project came into existence and clarified some misconceptions about the program. The presenter stressed that the AC always tried to identify on-going initiatives and programmes as opposed to duplicating efforts and attempts to be a catalyst in kick-starting processes. According to the speaker, AC believed in the need for harmonization, co-ordination and synchronization of donor activities and

attempted to work with groups working towards the same goals through partnerships. Key recommendations focused on the need to coordinate activities between the AC, ECA and others organisations engaged in similar efforts. Accordingly:

- There is a need to coordinate the activities of AC with ECA and others to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure the effective utilization of the limited resources available. It will also ensure the credibility of initiatives and help to influence donors.

- There is a need to clarify the relationship between the AISI and the AC as they were adopted by two groups of African Ministers - Ministers of Planning in the earlier case and of Communication in the latter.

- There is a need to continue discussions aimed at establishing ways of interaction between the ECA and the AC.

10.   The annual ATAC meeting continued on Friday 11th may 2001 with a presentation on the Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA), its programme activities and future directions.   ITCA was officially launched during the 1st ADF held on October 1999 to promote the awareness of the importance of ICT for African development by targeting the more than 18,000 delegates of UNCC coming to attend conferences, meetings and workshops each year. To implement its mission, ITCA is organised with 3 components: an Exhibition Center, a Training Center and an outreach center and has prepared exhibitions for the 2 ADFs, and also provided training for various target groups such as the youth, journalists, ambassadors, and women. Activities have been planned according to ECA's primary focus areas with exhibitions and training modules for each area.

11.   ATAC members and DISD Chief constitute the Advisory Group, which is responsible for drawing Africa relevant strategies for ITCA, and provide direction.   Hence the ITCA Business Plan was presented to the Advisory Group on 11 April 2001 together with the new ITCA brochure. Concerns were raised on sustainability issues and need for member States to contribute to the financial operation of the Centre.

12.   The Advisory Group commended ITCA staff for the good work undertaken and made recommendations focusing on:

- need for ITCA to pursue research and development activities

- necessity to replicate ITCA's training applications throughout the continent

- arranging internship for African IT specialists at the Centre

- making available ITCA applications for use by member States

13.   Following the above comments and recommendations, the ITCA Business Plan was approved by ATAC for implementation.

14.   There was a presentation by the secretariat on the Committee for Development Information CODI which is one of seven subsidiary bodies of the Economic commission for Africa (ECA), established in 1997 by the third meeting of Conference of African Ministers responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning. The presenter expressed that CODI provides policy and technical guidance for the sub-programme "harnessing information for development" and Development Information Services Division is responsible for implementing this sub-programme. The presenter clarified CODI's terms of reference and its composition and stated that three sub-committees in the following fields had been established: a) Information and communication technologies (CODI-ICT); b) Statistics (CODI-Stat); c) Geo-information (CODI-Geo). CODI is composed of government officials from member states of ECA as well as observers who are either organisations. Individuals can also attend as observers and attend the meeting on their own free will provided they can support their participation financially. There was a briefing on the recommendations made by the 1st meeting of CODI.

15.   Recommendations from participants include:

•   There is a need to make sure that participants drawn from member states are kind of people that can gain or contribute most to the meeting. Using different communication channels in addition to the formal (through ministry of foreign affairs).

•   It was stressed that the ATAC members convey the message of CODI the objectives it stands for by all means possible.

16.   A presentation was made on ECA's work programme for 2001-2001 which highlighted ECA's major activities in the areas of servicing of meetings of intergovernmental and expert bodies, international co-operation (co-ordinating the implementation of AISI through partnership), technical co-operation through advisory services, group training and field projects.

17.   The major outcomes of the discussion are presented below:

•   It was noted that ECA's shortage of staff at professional level has hampered the implementation of some of its programmes in the areas of ICTs. Effort has been made to fill existing vacant posts, and appropriate measure has to be taken to develop ECA's human resource capacities under UN's staffing regulations. The use of Interns to support the work programme has also been suggested.

•   ECA is forging partnership through a mechanism called "Friends of ECA" to support its ICT programme, particularly in light of donors shift in their approach from project to programme support. It was noted that bilateral donors, especially the Netherlands, Germany, Japan, India, Korea and France are supporting the work programme. There is also a strong need to revitalise and reactivate PICTA for forging partnership in ICT activities in Africa.

- It was expressed that more involvement of ECA's Sub-Regional Development Centres (SRDCs) in implementing some of the activities of the work programme are being considered, by identifying ICT focal points in each SRDC.

- As the theme of ADF 2001 will be on "regional integration", it was noted that an ICT focus group will be formed that will address the role of the application of ICTs to regional integration.

- The meeting was informed that ECA is working on developing a database of the African Diaspora to serve as a tool for addressing the brain drain issue.

- It was noted that ECA has put in place a communication strategy that backs up its work programme through the activities of ECA's Communication Team.

- Considering the variety of request for assistance received from member states, it was recommended that a repository of information be established to capture and analyse the requests for identifying the needs of specific countries.

- The use of African expertise to implement projects and programmes in the region has to be supported.

- It was noted that there has to be a strong follow-up mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the work programme, especially the NICI process through the provision of emphasis to the instruments used than the plans themselves.

Dot Force

18.   The ATAC session was followed by a meeting with the Dot Force member countries which started on Friday afternoon at approximately 2.45 p.m. In her introductory remarks, Ms. Bounemra, has put the following points as a rationale to the need for the joint meeting:

- To remind that Africa has its own ICT agenda (the AISI framework) and the need to popularize this globally;

- To justify that the AISI framework is an integral part of Africa's development agenda;

- To stress the need to building an international commitment and partnership for the implementation of AISI;

- To prepare an African position to the Dot Force, ECOSOC, and other international foras on the digital divide.

19.   Following this, four presentations were made by African representatives to the Dot Force, namely, Senegal, Tanzania, Egypt and South Africa. The presentations and discussion were focused on the elements Genoa Plan of Actions (GPA) and the four priority areas identified in Okinawa charter (2000): fostering policy, regulatory and network readiness; improvising connectivity; building human capacity; and participation in global e-commerce.

20.   The concerns included the following:

- The need to have an African voice and this common vision exists through the AISI framework and the concrete initiative emerged out of ADF '99. The representatives should value and uphold this vision in the Dot Force. These African members to the DotForce need to reflect a general feel of their respective sub-regions instead of individual countries;

- The need to stress localization and customization of ICT applications to the needs of Africa instead of talking about hardware and software;

- The need to re-engineer the nine areas of GPA to serve African needs on a mutual basis;

- The liberalisation of the telecommunication sector are at risk unless decision makers address an African vision;

- Suggestion was made that discussion take place based on the ECA's proposal to the Dot Force document along with the draft communiqué;

- The need to call for a high level (head of States) political endorsement and commitment;

- The need to form synergies among similar initiative was emphasized.

The way forward

21.   On Saturday 12 May, the different working groups presented the following documents:

- "Common position for Africa's Digital Inclusion"

- "Draft Communiqué- Meeting on Africa's Contribution to the Dot Force"

- "Draft report of the ATAC/ Africa's Contribution to the Dot Force meetings"

- "Draft Outline: Meeting Development Challenges Supported by Information and Communications Technologies: Executive Summary for Theme Papers".

22.   During the discussions on the "Common position" paper, it was recommended that AISI should be used as a starting point for preparing the common position. The delegate from

UNESCO commented that the RINAF project should be mentioned in Para 3 of the document as one of the projects that have emerged from AISI for implementation by African countries. While discussing ICT policies related issues, it was noted that the "establishment of ICT bodies at the very high level of political leadership" had to be included. In section B dealing with "Improving Connectivity and Access to Information in Africa", the role of community radio has to be added. In Section C, "Building Human and institutional capacity", while addressing the Diaspora issue, the utilisation of local professionals to reduce brain drain has to be indicated as well as the need to establish sub-regional ICT centers. Teachers' training as a possible area of focus in relation to education programmes should also be mentioned in Section A. UNESCO also reminded that all UN agencies under the framework of UNDAF should be included in the last paragraph of the document.

23.   It was noted that the document has to provide reference to the thematic documents and use them as background documents.

24.   Finally it was strongly recommended that in Para 2 of page 1 "existing and new initiatives… may consider" should be replaced by "should consider" and that the Executive Secretary of ECA should disseminate the common position through all his channels including his addresses in relevant events.

25.   The second working group presented the "draft communiqué" of the Meeting was then presented. During the discussions the main recommendation was addressed to ECA, requesting the Commission to organise a meeting/workshop to bring together all ICT initiatives in Africa to come up with a common position or unified matrix of activities in Africa. It was also highly recommended that the Heads of State and Government through a Summit should endorse the common position.

26.   The participants also noted that the document has to provide reference to AISI as a starting framework. One participant commented that the two documents, the Communiqué and the Common Position paper, need to be merged but the ECA Secretariat reminded that the different documents were targeting different audiences and that it was preferable that two documents should be produced: one document with general statements and extracts of the common position document with possible areas of implementation and that the second document should be more detailed (common position) addressed to a wider audience.

27.   It was also noted that the document should mention the creation of new jobs as related to brain drain and the human resource development problem in the first paragraph.

28.   Finally, it was stressed that ECA should play the political role to do the ground work looking into harmonisation to buy in others support before conducting the common meeting/ workshop of all the initiatives and that ECA should strongly reflect on the outcomes of this meeting.

29.   The third paper presented for discussion was the "Draft Outline: Meeting Development Challenges Supported by Information and Communications Technologies: Executive Summary for Theme Papers".

30.   The second part of the Saturday 12 May's meeting dealt on the presentation of the ATAC's meeting report and the Way Forward to ECA's and ATAC members joint activities.

31.   Issues raised during the discussions on the way forward:

The need of an internal working document-guidelines- for ATAC members as the TOR does not really reflect the ATAC members activities.

The need to define the scope of the communication strategy
The need to showcase the exhibition of indigenous contents and products
The issue of standing observers of ATAC

32.   It was also proposed that:

- ATAC members could assist ECA in being a moderator of the discussion list and that this could rotate on a quarterly basis.

- Each ATAC member should have a specific mandate to clarify the work of the Committee and should be assigned tasks for the short term.

- ECA should post documents on the electronic list long time in advance to enable ATAC members to be well prepared before meetings.

- A more active dissemination of national, regional and sub regional information on "what is new in Africa" should be promoted

- It was important to work highly with ECA to coordinate the "lobbying activity" of ATAC members.

33.   ECA secretariat thanked the ATAC members for their willingness to moderate the discussion list and acknowledged that this would contribute to a more active discussion list than what was experienced before because of ECA's workload.

34.   ECA secretariat informed ATAC members that it will prepare and circulate the guidelines and that each member should concentrate in its area of representation but shouldn't be limited to that. Participants were also informed that as part of the AISI's marketing process a FAQ about AISI should be drafted in common between ECA and the Committee. As members of the ITCA Steering Committee, ATAC members should also be involved in ITCA's activities and inform the Center on any interesting indigenous African applications.

35.   Mrs Bounemra informed ATAC members that the Secretariat will circulate professional posts vacancies and also asked them to help ECA in preparing member States for the Post Forum Summit.

36.   The meeting ended with a brief presentation of Mr Brahima Sanou, Head of ITU's Regional Office who reiterated its organisation commitment to promote and implement AISI's objectives.