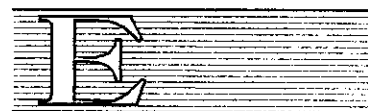




UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA



Distr. : GENERAL

E/ECA/DISD/CODI.2/26

13 August 2001

Original : ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Second Meeting of the committee
On Development Information (CODI)

Addis Ababa (Ethiopia),
4-7 September 2001

**Report on ECA activities in the area of information and
communication technologies, Information systems and libraries
(1999-2001) and Programme of Work
for the biennium (2002-2003)**

Report on ECA activities in the area of information and communication technologies, Information systems and libraries (1999-2001) and Programme of Work for the biennium (2002-2003)

The Economic Commission for Africa has carried out a number of activities in the area of ICT during the last two years (July 1999 to September 2001). One of the key accomplishments is the holding of the first African Development Forum (ADF'99). The following section provides a list of activities that have been carried out by the ICT team since CODI.I.

▪ Progress in Implementation of the Work Programme

a) *ADF'99 and Subsequent Activities*

The African Development Forum is an ECA initiative to direct attention to a different critical development problem annually with a view to engaging African decision-makers, practitioners and thinkers and accelerating the search for solutions. ADF '99 focused on "the challenge to Africa of globalisation and the information age" and examined the progress made in the first three years of the implementation of the African Information Society Initiative. Close to one thousand participants assembled to showcase African information society projects and policies and to shape a strategy to enhance Africa's connection to the global information society at the start of the new millennium. The resulting strategy from ADF'99 calls for commitment from the highest levels of leadership to applying ICTs to Africa's pressing social and economic problems.

It targets four areas:

- Applications to support the educational process and meet the needs of Africa's youth;
- Applications in support of the delivery of health care;
- Opportunities for business and trade;
- Creating the enabling policy environment.

Programmes in these areas now constitute the core of the follow up to ADF and the renewed vision of the AISI. The African Development Forum is designed as a process that captures results, builds consensus and moves proposals forward to implementation. A Post-Forum Dialogue has been a key component of the overall process. The Post-Forum Dialogue is intended to review the information society strategies that were considered by ADF participants to be among the most promising to Africa's search for its own definition of the information society.

Activities since ADF'99 include a consultation process on a Post Forum Dialogue and implementation of recommendations of ADF'99. Some of the achievements include:

- ECA staff involved in ADF '99, including the Executive Secretary and the regional advisors on information and communication policy have taken advantage of their travels to promote the strategy and its component elements, ensure that they adequately reflect national priorities and needs and identify opportunities for partnership;
- ECA and its partners have convened a number of national, sub-regional and regional and international workshops designed to provide decision-makers and specialists with an opportunity for in-depth review of the proposals in the areas of education and youth, health and electronic commerce. Among the major workshops include Regional NICI workshops for Southern and Eastern Africa, national workshops in Ethiopia, Swaziland, Rwanda, Zambia, Burundi, Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Cape Verde, Ghana, Togo and Namibia;
- ECA was invited to showcase the ADF '99 strategy at meetings convened by sister organizations throughout the region. Such meetings on occasion provide the opportunity to initiate implementation of the proposals: the Community of National Regulators, for example, has been setup during a conference convened by the African Information Technology and Exhibition Centre (AITEC) that was held in Sun City in South Africa at the end of August 2000;
- Discussions and studies were undertaken in four critical areas that have led to the publication of four background documents that will be used in implementing the work programme:
 - Electronic Commerce in Africa;
 - Information and Communication technology policies and strategies;
 - The African Learning Network: Emerging behind the knowledge curtain, an agenda for youth and education in Africa;
 - Information and communication technologies in the health sector in Africa.

A review meeting was held in March 2000 to consider the documents in the four areas identified above.

b) International Co-operation and liaison

Despite a growing access to the Internet in Africa, the meteoric rise of Internet and its content in developed world made it difficult for the region to catch up. Internet users have now passed the 400 million mark. Africa has only about 2.5 million Internet users of which 1.82 million are in South Africa. Despite being home for 12% of the world

population, Africa accounts only for about .3% of the world Internet content. This "digital divide" has been a key concern of international development aid agencies and the developed world during the last two years. As a

result, major international bodies have recently launched potentially highly significant initiatives to apply ICT to the needs of the developing countries.

- Under the auspices of The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) a high-level panel of information technology experts from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and elsewhere met in April 2000. They called upon the United Nations to play a leadership and catalytic role in helping to bridge the digital divide and accelerate development by harnessing the development potential of information and communication technologies (ICT);
- In a Ministerial declaration in July, ECOSOC adopted the high-level group's recommendations and recognized the key role of partnerships among national governments, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in putting ICT in the service of development;
- In a related development, at their meeting in Okinawa in July 2000, the G8 group of industrialised nations adopted the Okinawa Charter on the Global Information Society and resolved to set up a Digital Opportunities Task Force (Dot Force). The Dot Force is making consultations to come up with findings and recommendations on global action to bridge the international information and knowledge divide and report back at the next G8 meeting in 2001.

One of the major activities of the ECA programme in ICT was advocating for African position at these initiatives. ECA held two consultative workshops to set an African agenda for the G8 Summit and ECOSOC session in June 2001. The first workshop will was held 3-4 May 2001 in Addis Ababa bringing together the members of the Partners for Information and Communications Technologies in Africa (PICTA), the African Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC) on the African Information Society Initiative and the representatives of the G8 DOT Force from South Africa, Senegal, Egypt and Tanzania. The meeting produced a "common position" document that reflects Africa's position to global fora on ICTs including the G8 DOT Force, ECOSOC, United Nations Task Force, World Economic Forum, etc. It called upon regional, international, bilateral and non governmental organizations, to support the implementation of the recommendations set out in the Common Position for Africa's digital inclusion. The second consultative workshop was held in May 2001 in New York to provide input to the ECOSOC. Among other international and regional forum in which ECA participated include:

- Global Knowledge II (GKII) Conference and Action Summit (Kuala Lumpur), Malaysia, 7-10 March 2000;

- Meeting of African Network Operators Group (AFNOG) and African Network Information Centre (AFNIC), Cape Town, South Africa, 6-7 May 2000;
- International Symposium on Information Technology for Development, organized as an input to the G8 Meeting in Okinawa, Japan, 2-4 July 2000;
- ECOSOC Segment on Information Technology for Development, New York, July 2000;
- Forum of African Telecommunication Regulators, South Africa, 29 August to 1 September 2000;
- Forum on Telecommunication Regulation in Africa, Gaborone, Botswana, 25 – 27 October 2000;
- ITAG, Paris, 2-5 October 2000;
- Global Society Development, Germany, Reissensburg, 1 – 4 October 2000;
- Third UNESCO Congress on Ethical, Legal and Societal Challenges of Cyberspace, 13-15 November 2000;
- Working sessions with WIPO in view of finalising ECA/WIPO cooperation, 17-20 November 2000;
- Development Symposium for Regulators, 20-22 November 2000;
- GKP Annual Meeting, 22 - 23 March 2001;
- Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC III) Brussels, 15-20 May 2001.

c) **Technical Publication and Materials**

In addition to four key documents that have been prepared as a background for ADF'99 the ICT team has produced a number of papers on the status of ICT utilization for development and their application. Some of the key papers include:

- Status on information and communication technologies in Africa;
- Building the information economy in Africa;
- Regional studies on electronic commerce in Africa in collaboration with IDRC.

ECA has also been maintaining a web site on National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) and content development in Africa. The sites were designed to identify the level of penetration of information and communication technologies and content development in Africa. They are intended to create awareness among decision-makers, planners, ICT producers and users to support an integrated approach to ICT development in the region. The information for web page is drawn from ECA's own sources and other national and international data sources.

ECA has also been gathering development oriented data from various public and research institutes in member States, compiling them in printed and electronic format to disseminate it to its clients. A CD-ROM entitled the "Africa Development CD-ROM 2000" has been produced to provide access to development information using an alternate medium of dissemination.

d) Field Projects

Although the number of field projects has decreased during this reporting period, ECA launched a new project entitled Scan-ICT. The Scan-ICT aims to build support for a phased development of a comprehensive African capability to collect and manage key information needed to support the growing investment in information and communication technologies in Africa. It intends to create a pan-African ICT network, connecting all levels of ICT related issues, co-ordinated and supported by an observatory/research institute that monitors the penetration, impact and effectiveness of ICT application in Africa.

Current Scan-ICT partners include the International Development Research Center, European Commission (DGVIII), Norwegian Agency for International Development, UNECA and ITU. UNESCO has agreed to join the Steering Committee recently. Discussions are presently on-going with several other organisations including the Carnegie Corporation of New York, OECD, Agence Francaise de développement. The Scan-ICT was launched in November 2000 during which methodologies of the project were discussed extensively. Mozambique, Morocco and Uganda have submitted their proposal for Scan-ICT studies since.

The ICT team has also developed a business plan for the Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA). ITCA is implementing a number of field project including a joint project financed by CISCO and the World Bank InfoDev programme for training African women entrepreneurs in Internetworking.

e) *National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) Plans, Policies and Strategies*

The major programme of ECA in ICT area has been the development of national strategies in member states. Development of national information and communication strategies involves:

- Providing advisory services to member States on importance of developing a comprehensive and deliberate national information and communication infrastructure policies and strategies;
- Holding national/regional workshops on the importance of development of information society, strategic information systems, communications infrastructure and the creation of an enabling environment;
- Assessment of the status of communications infrastructure, the gaps in policies and regulatory environment, human resources development needs, current strategic information systems (applications and content) in key areas of socio-economic development;
- Development of NICI policies and plans.

Over twenty-five countries were covered during this reporting period. Rwanda tops the countries that have completed a comprehensive NICI policy and plan. ECA will continue promoting National Information and Communication strategies in other countries.

□ **Proposed Programme Budget for the Biennium 2002-2003**

a) Servicing of intergovernmental/expert bodies :

- One report on National Information Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans and policies, sectoral applications, and content development to ECA Conference of Ministers (2002);
- One Report on National Information Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans and policies, sectoral applications, and content development to the Inter-governmental Committee of Experts of the ECA Sub-regional Development Centres in (2002);
- One report on National Information Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans and policies, sectoral applications, and content development to CODI meeting in 2003.

b) Other substantive activities :

- (i) Non recurrent publications. One publication on Country profiles including success stories in ICTs and NICI plans; one report on ICT indicators and ICT impact at a country level ; one report on Harnessing the African Diaspora to help Africa's development.

- (ii) Electronic, audio and video issuances. One Africa Development CD-ROM including statistical and bibliographic data, the Economic report, indicators on gender and African Content on the Web.
- (iii) Technical Materials. One DataBase, one website and electronic communication list (e.g. with the African Diaspora, African Regulators, to strengthen Africa's participation in global ICT fora...).

c) International cooperation and intercepting coordination and liaison:

- (i) Co-ordinating, harmonizing and liaisoning the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) with partners at all levels including with management of Partnership for Information and Communication Technologies in Africa (PICTA) and the African Technical Advisory Committee to the African Information Society Initiative ;
- (ii) Harmonization, liaison and collaboration with other United Nations Agencies and other partners, such as coordination and cooperation with regional and national information centers, services and libraries to harmonize, standardize information systems and to emerge with African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN).
- (iii) Co-operation with Regional Economic Communities such as ECOWAS, COMESA, UMA, CEMAC, SADC, UEMOA, etc on sectoral applications (e.g., Health, Education, E-Commerce, etc), development of regional communication systems, and ICT Governance.

d) Technical cooperation :

- (i) Advisory services. Two advisory services on developing National Information and Communication Infrastructures (NICI) and National Geospatial Information Infrastructure (NGII); regional communication systems for information exchange; sectoral applications (e.g. health, education, electronic commerce) and content development.
- (ii) Group trainings (seminars, workshops, symposia). Four workshops on developing National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) and National Geospatial Information Infrastructure (NGII) plans, regional communication systems for information exchange, sectoral applications and content development.
- (iii) Field projects. Three projects in implementing the African Information Society Initiative and Post-Summit follow up activities (e.g. health, education and electronic commerce).

□ **Conclusion**

Current evidence in innovative use of information and communication technologies by small and medium enterprises, government and educational institutions in Africa shows that the region can take advantage of the ICT revolution. ICT is seen by many as the last chance for Africa to provide new job and income opportunities for the next generation, reduce poverty and help close the development gap between the north and South and between "haves" and "have nots". But obstacles remain, including lack of political and public awareness, limited infrastructure, small markets, low levels of education and skills as well as a variety of policy barriers. Tremendous efforts are still required to build African capacity for its active participation in the global information economy. ECA's programme in the ICT field within the renewed New African Initiative will continue to focus on the development of national information and communication infrastructure strategies and creation of an enabling policy and regulatory environment to ensure development of ICTs in the social and economic sector, improving access to ICT by youth and the education, health and business sectors and to build sufficient human resource with high-level skills and entrepreneurship to take advantage of the information revolution.