

UNECA and Microsoft join forces to support economic growth and opportunity in Africa

Addis Ababa-29 January 2010-ECA-The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and Microsoft today announced the signing of a partnership agreement to promote development and foster regional cooperation in Africa by **leveraging information and communication technology (ICT)**. The signing, presided over by the United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ECA, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh and the Microsoft Africa Chairman (Middle East & Africa), Dr. Cheick Modibo Diarra, took place at the UNECA headquarters in Addis Ababa as a pre-event to the 14th African Union Summit of Heads of State and Government with the theme "Information and Communication technologies in Africa: challenges and prospects for development".

Through the public-private partnership, UNECA and Microsoft will employ their respective expertise in a number of areas including: access to software and technical support; local software development; **capacity building in ICT for socio-economic development**; and supporting the development of Africa's e-government programmes through enhanced use of ICT. Partnership programmes will support and align closely with the work of UNECA's Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA) to raise awareness and commitment in the use of ICT as a driver of economic opportunities in Africa. Microsoft will assist in technology infrastructure planning for the ITCA and provide curriculum and certification to ITCA trainers so that they can in turn teach ICT skills. The partners will use a "**train the trainer**" approach to ensure the long-term sustainability and scalability of the centre.

During the ceremony Mr. Abdoulie Janneh emphasized that: "Technology is a powerful tool to help drive investment competitiveness and growth on the African continent. Through this partnership, we aim to strengthen Africa's access to ICT tools to build modern economies".

The partnership will also include collaboration on issues relating to safeguarding intellectual property, security of information systems and networks and minimizing the impact of attacks on citizens and critical infrastructures. Dr. Cheick Modibo Diarra stated that: "Microsoft is committed to helping provide creative thinking and innovative solutions in areas where the necessary resources and capabilities are often lacking. Our partnership will allow us to use ICT to support UNECA's broad mandate and apply the potential ICT has in supporting economic development in Africa".

The collaboration further broadens Microsoft' overall commitment to Africa and its partnerships with other major international organizations - including the African Union, African Development Bank, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Microsoft first began operations in Sub-Saharan African in 1992 and has expanded to 13 offices in 9 countries, with more than 600 employees and over 17,000 commercial partners across the region.

Background

About ECA

The ECA was established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations (UN) in 1958 as one of the UN's five regional commissions. Its mandate is to promote the economic and social development of its member States, foster intra-regional integration and promote international cooperation for Africa's development. Recognizing the important role that ICTs play in facilitating the attainment of development goals and their multiplier effects on growth and economic and social development, launched and adopted the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) at a Conference of African Ministers in charge of planning and social and economic development in 1996. AISII is an action framework to build Africa's information and communication infrastructure in acknowledgement of the pivotal role ICTs can play in promoting the socio-economic development of the continent. AISII provides the roadmap to guide African countries in addressing the challenges of the emerging globalization and the information age by developing and implementing e-strategies (National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) policies and plans) within the wider national socio-economic development objectives, strategies and aspirations. Since the launch of AISII, ECA support has been in the form of upstream policy advice to assist countries in the design of strategic approaches to ICTs as an enabler for development with links to Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) and related development goals. More than 40 countries on the continent have embarked on the development and implementation of these policies and plans. Another distinguishing feature of the ICT policy process in line with AISII is the assistance being given to Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to implement their Information Society programmes and initiatives through Regional policies and plans which address among others, partnerships and regulatory issues and provide a framework for the development of information and communication infrastructure whilst strengthening capacity and also building a critical mass to facilitate regional economic integration through ICTs..

About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential

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