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**National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) Plans
in West Africa**

1. E-strategy Framework in Africa: the African Information Society Initiative

In the global networked economy, information and knowledge have become strategic resources, based on which governments, corporations and the public at large make their decisions. The countries which have created an enabling environment are experiencing revolutionary effects especially in the governance, education, health and business sectors, as its citizens are now more empowered, change the equilibrium of power and start creating choices and opportunities for themselves. Yet, there are countries in Africa where people are not able to make informed decisions on their daily lives because of lack of access to ICTs, information and knowledge.

As a response to these realities, the Conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in May 1995, adopted the Africa Information Society Initiative (AISI)[1]. Driven by critical development imperatives, AISI focuses on priority strategies, programmes and projects, which can assist in building African information societies. A key component of the AISI is the development of national e-strategies, or the National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans.

On a continental basis, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) framework has identified a number of projects and initiatives for ICT development, which will also speed up sub-regional and regional connectivity and inter-connectivity plans at the same time. NEPAD insists on strengthening the role of the Regional Economic Communities (REC) that should be coordinating national efforts and aiming at harmonizing national regulatory frameworks across the sub-regions. AISI serves as the framework for co-ordination of the support that UN agencies provide to the NEPAD.

Furthermore, AISI recommends that ICTs be mainstreamed in other sectors that are judged potentially important for Africa's development, and these include: job creation, culture, trade and commerce, and governance, which was added to the list during subsequent assessment exercises of the AISI in the African Development Forum (ADF)'99 and Bamako 2002.
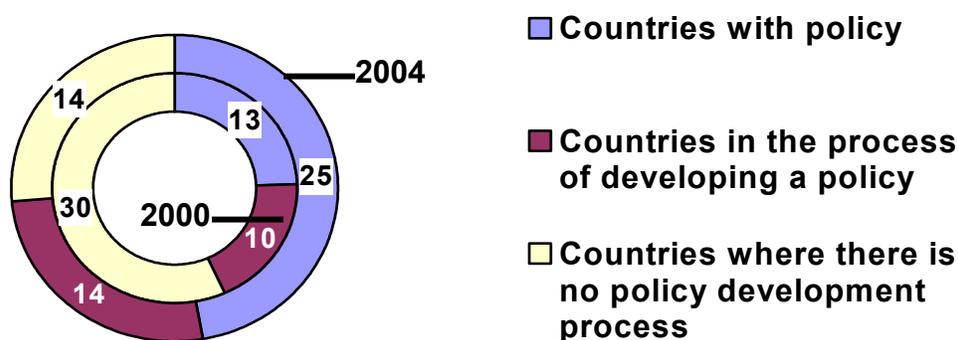
This report assesses progress made in national ICT policies, plans and strategies in West Africa, focusing on the role of ECA. It also highlights lessons learned from the e-strategy development process, and prospects from ICT for development ECOWAS Strategic Plan.

2. National E-strategies in Africa

ECA has been assisting member states in their endeavors to initiate, formulate and implement national e-strategies with a view to achieving their development goals. The success is evident in the fact that the number of countries with ICT policies increased from 13 in 2000 to 25 in 2004, while countries in the process of developing a policy jumped from 10 in 2000 to 14 in 2004. Thus, the number of countries without a plan was reduced from 30 to 14 in 2004.

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[1] http://www.uneca.org/aisi/

Development of National ICT Policy

Legend:
- Countries with policy
- Countries in the process of developing a policy
- Countries where there is no policy development process

This progress has been a result of increased awareness on the importance of ICT policies and plans among decision and policy makers and key stakeholders, which is also reflected in the inclusion and emphasis, placed in various international and regional agendas. For example, the NEPAD framework identifies ICT policies and regulations as a priority area. The formulation of national policies, strategies and legislation has been highlighted as the foundation for the ICT development in the member countries as well as in the region. A number of countries have already stepped up to the next phase of the plan implementation. A comprehensive list of NICI countries is attached as Annex.

3. ECOWAS NICI countries in process of policy formulation

In collaboration with various partners, particularly the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) ECA has finalized NICI development activities in the following West African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea. With the cooperation of the European Union (EU) and Finland, ECA has finalized the development of NICI plans in Ghana, Niger and Nigeria. The Gambia, Mali and Sierra Leone are at various stages of the policy formulation process.

Ghana

The Ghana NICI policy entitled '*The Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD) Policy*, was published in December 2003, with a forward by the President of Ghana. This Policy, which is based on 14 pillars, is designed to aid Ghana's development process including the following:

- Creating the necessary enabling environment to facilitate the deployment, utilization and exploitation of ICTs within the economy and society;

- Supporting the development of a viable knowledge-based ICT industry to facilitate the production, manufacturing, development, delivering and distribution of ICT products and services.

- Facilitating the modernization of the agricultural sector through the deployment and exploitation of ICTs to improve on its efficiency and productivity;

- Facilitating the development, expansion, rehabilitation and the continuous modernisation of the national information and communication infrastructure;

- Facilitating the widespread deployment and exploitation of ICTs within the society to support the delivery of health and social services.

The policy was subsequently discussed and approved by Parliament in early February 2003 and plans are in place for supporting the NICI presentation to potential donors, including through the global *e-Policy Resource Network (ePol-NET)*, which is one of the major mechanisms to support the implementation of NICI plans, as a result of a partnership between ECA (Regional Node for Africa) and Industry Canada. The aim of the services under this project is to provide expertise, guidance and advisory services on regulatory issues, as well as strategies in areas such as e-commerce, legal and policy frameworks, telecommunications policy, e-government and connectivity issues. The Ghana Government has since made a request for ePol-Net services.

Mali

After a one-year interruption of the NICI process due to internal changes in Mali, ECA was invited to renew its commitments. Consequently an advisory mission was sent to Bamako and the consultant restarted his activity. The NICI baseline study is being finalized and a stakeholders' consultation meeting is expected to take place in May followed by a NICI validation workshop in June 2004.

Niger

The NICI process in Niger culminated in January 2004 with the adoption of the NICI Plan by the Cabinet during a workshop chaired by the Prime Minister. The process was done through a series of nation-wide consultations and preparation of several sectoral documents to support development of the NICI Plan. After adoption by Cabinet, the Prime Minister of Niger has requested ECA to support in disseminating the plan and awareness raising among stakeholder

Nigeria

Following several requests from the officials, a mission was sent to Abuja to discuss modalities of starting the NICI development process. Subsequently a team was formed and a lead consultant recruited to spearhead the development process. The NICI plan baseline study has been finalized in November 2003 and consultations are underway to prepare the Framework document. ECA has hired since December a Nigerian consultant who is based at the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) to lead the NICI process. The NICI plan is expected to be finalized by the end of 2004.

The Gambia

Following the designation of the Gambia as pilot case for developing an AISI e-government strategy, several activities are being carried out in the

country. In this regard a baseline study was completed in September 2003 and submitted to a stakeholders' consultation meeting in October. Subsequently the e-government strategy was finalized and implementation projects are being developed for submission to a validation workshop expected to take place in Banjul in May 2004. The Gambia has also benefited from the full NICI process and a consultant has already been hired to undertake his first mission to Banjul in May 2004.

Sierra Leone

Following a request from the minister of planning, terms of reference have been finalized. An ECA mission is planned for 2004 to initiate the process, and he activities are expected to start after May 2004.

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4.   Lessons Learned and regional cooperation and integration

A number of lessons have been learnt over the past years in the development of national ICT plans and summarised below:

- Need for increased awareness
- Importance of the high level leadership
- The NICI process could be more participatory
- Need for learning from experiences of others – best practices
- Transition from ideas and concepts to concrete action plans
- Need for increased attention to sectoral policies and strategies
- Human and institutional capacity must be strengthened
- Prioritisation of external assistance
- Increasing regional cooperation and integration

In the Framework of the sub regional activities, ECA will launch during 2004, an initiative on Legal Framework for e-commerce in ECOWAS.

5 The Telecommunications Sector in ECOWAS Sub Region

A Programme for developing the Telecommunication Regional infrastructure (INTELCOM II) is implemented with the objective to totally interconnect the Telecommunications Networks before the end of 2007.

All ECOWAS countries except one have separated Post and Telecommunications activities, and initiated the liberalization of the sector.

Ten Countries from Fifteen have established Telecommunications Regulation Authorities, and a process has been started for Telecommunications Regulation Harmonization with the creation of the West Africa Telecommunications Regulators Association: WATRA.

An action Plan has been formulated for the Telecommunications Harmonization process in Sub Region

6.   ICT for Development in the ECOWAS Strategic Action Plan 2004-2007

After the successful formulation of NICI plans, the countries have been requesting further assistance from ECA in sector-specific areas. Services required range from development of an implementation strategy to examination of the work programmes, to resource mobilization, development of sectoral strategies and monitoring of the implementation plan. This underlines the importance of ECA's role in providing assistance for the formulation and piloting of sectoral policies and strategies. Special attention is being paid to e-governance, democratizing access, private sector development and content development to meet AISI and MDG objectives. In addition, ECA is proposing a new dimension of village information and communications infrastructure (VICI) plans to the existing process to extend policy-making and implementation. The pilot phase is expected to be implemented in Ghana. ECA

will also place more emphasis on the expedited participation of the countries currently without a national ICT policy in the global knowledge society.

A great deal still needs to be done with respect to the development of effective implementation plans once national strategies have been formulated, based on the availability of adequate infrastructure.

However, from ECA's perspective, national e-strategies as part of the AISI goals will increasingly be geared towards addressing the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) so that ICTs can assist in the reduction of poverty, improve healthcare delivery, provide education opportunities for all, particularly the girl-child, create employment opportunities as well as food security.

In addition, even though governments need to take the lead in the development of national strategies, other key stakeholders should be encouraged to play their part in both the formulation and implementation process. This is partly the reason why ECA places a great deal of emphasis on the NICI consultation process ensuring that stakeholders' needs and interest are reflected and accommodated in the policy documents. Given the importance of various actors in enabling the implementation of national strategies, ECA has also embarked awareness raising through extensive outreach and communication activities targeted at Members of Parliament, civil society groups (particularly women's groups), academia, the media, as well as the diaspora. The policy process should be flexible to incorporate other thematic and emerging issues emerging both at the national and regional levels that have relevance to countries.

In this context ECA has contributed to the formulation of the ICT for development component of the ECOWAS Strategic Plan 2004-2007.

The Medium-term objective of the ECOWAS ICT program will be to put in place an information for development program to promote harmonization of national policies and plans, development of appropriate information infrastructure which will support innovative applications to foster regional growth.

While the earlier ECOWAS Strategic Plan focused mainly on promotion of telecommunication regulation, the current plan will promote, harmonize and monitor development of the information society, including telecommunication regulation, infrastructure development, Human Resource Development, ICT policies, sectoral applications and content.

This will be translated in the following main actions:

- Establishment of a harmonised legal, legislative and regulatory telecommunications framework, which will pave the way for the establishment of a single, liberalised telecommunications and information society market by 2007.
- Putting in place a harmonized enabling environment for a favourable investment climate for private public partnerships.
- Adoption and implementation of platforms for e-applications, especially for a common e-commerce policy aimed at encouraging development in e-commerce
- supporting national economic development, and boosting trade in the ECOWAS zone.
- Putting in place a region-wide high-speed backbone and communication exchange points to facilitate traffic within the region and between ECOWAS and other parts of the world.
- Developing strategies for participation in global information issues, especially negotiations for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Annex: National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) Strategies

Country	Existence of a national strategy	Implementation status
Algeria	Has a National Policy and a National strategy	Several sectoral implementation strategies are being developed
Angola	A plan known as "Strategy for The Development of Information technology 2000-2010" has been elaborated.	The Government of Angola created a National Commission for Information Technology by Decree no. 6/2002 of 4 April 2002.
Benin	The Communication and Information Infrastructure Development Plan of Benin: 2000-2004 was approved in 2000.	The implementation has started with the creation of an agency that promotes ICT. A work programme has also been developed in 2001 and updated in 2002.
Burkina Faso	An Information and Communication Infrastructure Development Plan of Burkina Faso: 2000-2004 was approved in October 2000.	Implementation has started. Several sectoral implementation strategies are being developed. Interministerial committees have been created for follow-up
Burundi	The Cabinet adopted the National strategy for the development of information and communication technologies in Burundi in 2002.	The document is being circulated for wide dissemination and consultations before implementation.
Cape Verde	The NICI plan development process was finalized in October 2000. A National Information and Communication Technologies Infrastructure Development Plan was the product of the process.	The implementation has started.
Cameroon	The draft NICI plan was finalized in October 2001	The draft NICI Plan will be reviewed and circulated for wide consultations before its submission to Cabinet
Central African Republic	The process of the elaboration of the National Strategy has started in January 2002. A baseline study was undertaken in June/July 2002.	Due to political instability the process is stalled but will resume as soon as possible.
Cote d'Ivoire	The NICI Plan was approved by the Council of Ministers in July 2000.	A Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies has been created to implement the NICI Plan. Priority projects were identified for implementation, however due to political instability the process is stalled
Djibouti	A draft strategy was developed in February 2003	The document is being circulated to partners for implementation
Egypt	Egypt launched its National Information Highway programme to support and energize its socio-economic development as early as 1994.	Implementation of many projects for the development of ICT industries and the advent of universal access. The establishment of the Ministry for Telecommunications and Information in 1999.
Ethiopia	The Draft National ICT Policy document initially drafted in July 2001 is now adopted by the Council of Ministers.	The first cycle of the implementation plan covering the period 2003 - mid 2008 is ready. A national ICT Coordinating Office is being established to manage the implementation process, monitoring and evaluation.
Gabon	A Development Plan based on the network for sustainable development was finalized in 2000.	Infrastructure development is the main focus of the plan
Gambia	A draft National Policy on information and communication issued in 1999	The Telecom sector is growing considerably. An e-government strategy is being developed
Ghana	The policy entitled 'The Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development (ICT4AD) Policy', was published in December 2003 with a forward by the President of Ghana. The policy was subsequently discussed and approved by Parliament in early February 2004.	The Government wants to put a mid and long-term strategy for ICT development in place. Plans are in place for supporting the NICI presentation to potential donors.
Guinea	The NICI plan was completed in February 2002	Implementation structures are being put in place

Country	Existence of a national strategy	Implementation status
Kenya	The process of an comprehensive national strategy based on a broad national consultation has started in 2001.	A Local Experts Team has been created to draft the document on National Strategy
Lesotho	A National Information and Communication Policy was prepared in 2002.	Development of a NICI plan is planned for 2003
Malawi	The process of developing a national strategy has started in 2002	The ICT Policy framework for was finalized in May 2002. The NICI Plan is being finalized
Mali	The process of developing a national strategy has started in 2002	The Government has created "la Mission de l'Informatique et des Nouvelles Technologies de l'Information" to implement the Government Policy and to promote ICT. The NICI plan is being prepared
Mauritania	National Information and Communication Infrastructure Development Plan: 1999–2002	The Government has created "le Secrétariat d'Etat aux Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication" to review the NICI plan and to promote ICT
Mauritius	The National IT strategic plan of 1998.	A number of projects in policy formulation, ICT awareness, human resources development, government computerization and standard setting were launched following the National IT strategic plan in 1998.
Morocco	A national IT policy 1999-2003 was elaborated and approved in 1999 by the government for implementation. The e-Maroc strategy adopted in 2001, is in the implementation phase.	Several implementation strategies, programmes and projects have been put in place
Mozambique	A national strategy was developed and adopted in July 2002.	The Commission on Information and Communication Technologies has been put in place to coordinate the development and implementation of the plan.
Namibia	A revised draft policy proposal on Information and Communication Technology Policy for the Republic of Namibia was submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting in March 2002.	Adoption by the Cabinet is expected during the first half of 2003
Niger	The NICI policy was approved in December 2003.	The "Centre de coordination de l'Informatique et des NTIC" has been put in place to promote ICT and to coordinate the development of the NICI plan
Nigeria	The Nigerian Information and Communication Technology Agency (NICTA) formulated a "Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology (IT)" after consultation with stakeholders that took place in 2000. The process of developing the NICI plan will start in June 2003	A Development Agency for ICT is put in place to coordinate the development of a National Strategy and the promotion of ICTs
Rwanda	The NICI plan was adopted in 2002 by the Cabinet and Parliament	The Cabinet officially launched the NICI Plan, NICI 2005, in January 2002. The proposed implementation structure has been created. It consists of the National Information Technology Commission (NITC), the NITC Working Group and the Rwandan Information Technology Authority (RITA.)
Senegal	The National ICT Plan was adopted in 2000.	The Government has put in place, under the Office of the President, the regulatory and administrative tools necessary for the promotion of competition and the implementation of e-government
Seychelles	A National Strategy on ICT has been put in place	The implementation started on many sectors linked to trade and capacity building
Sierra Leone	Plans are underway to launch the NICI process in May 2004.	
South Africa	The South Africa IT Strategy Project (SAITIS) was developed by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Communication, in consultation with the private sector and other stakeholders.	The implementation has started and covers all sectors. A Presidential Advisory Committee was put in place to oversee implementation and ensure coordination

Country	Existence of a national strategy	Implementation status
Sudan	Preparations were underway in 1999 to elaborate the national information and communication plans for Sudan. Since then a national ICT strategy has been formulated.	The National Information Centre was put in place in 2002 to implement and promote ICT in the Government departments.
Swaziland	The first national workshop on ICT policy that was organized by the UNDP, UNESCO, ECA and the Swaziland National Association of Journalists (SNAJ) took place in November 2000.	The national Policy will be oriented towards the media, telecommunication and ICT industries
Tanzania	The ICT Task Force produced the first order draft of the National ICT Policy of Tanzania in April 2002.	Development of the implementation strategy is expected to take place in 2003.
Tunisia	There is a National Policy and a strategy of implementation as of 1997.	The implementation has started and the regulatory and institutional tools have been put in place to promote ICT for development
Uganda	A draft national policy – Strategy for Developing a National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy for Uganda - was completed in September 2002.	The NICI plan is being developed. Meanwhile the competition is kept and the ICT sector is developing.
Zambia	A draft national policy was completed in 2002	The approval of the National Policy is expected in 2003