



**ECA**

**Workshop on "Intellectual Leadership  
and the African Information Society  
Initiative:  
What Role for Africa's Academic  
Community?"**



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**What is the African Information Society Initiative (AISI)?**



## **The African Information Society Initiative (AISI)**

### **What is AISI <sup>1</sup>?**

The African Information Society Initiative (AISI) is an action framework that has been the basis for information and communication activities in Africa for the last seven years. AISI is not about technology. It is about giving Africans the means to improve the quality of their lives and fight against poverty.

### **Why AISI?**

AISI was launched in 1996 as Africa needed a common vision for its quest not only to bridge the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world but more importantly to create effective digital opportunities to be developed by Africans and their partners, and to speed the continent's entry into the information and knowledge global economy.

### **Who supports AISI?**

The AISI has been getting various endorsements since its launch at the 22nd meeting of ECA's Conference of Ministers in charge of social and economic development and planning in May 1996. These include:

- adoption by the OAU Heads of State summit at the 64th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers meeting held in Yaounde, Cameroon, from 1 to 5 July 1996
- endorsement by the African telecom ministers during the African Regional Telecommunication Development Conference, organised by the ITU and held in Abidjan in May 1996
- support by the then G7+1 as Africa's major ICT initiative in its 1997 Summit in Denver
- recommendation by the ECA Conference of Ministers of Planning and Finance, held in Algiers, from 8 to 10 May 2001, as the guiding framework for ICT initiatives in Africa. The Ministers have invited international partners to consider launching a special initiative to support the harnessing of ICT for development as defined in the African Information Society Initiative and updated in the African Development Forum 1999.

### **Partnerships, activities and achievements**

Since its inception, AISI has been supported and implemented through partnerships. ECA joins multilateral, bilateral, and non-governmental partners, as well as representatives of the private sector and African member States, in implementing AISI. An important vehicle for AISI partnership is the *Partnership for Information and Communication Technologies in Africa (PICTA)*<sup>2</sup> ECA is also a leading

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.uneca.org/aisi>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.uneca.org/picta>

member of the *Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP)*. The PICTA working model and methodologies have been widely replicated, mainly through the GKP annual meetings and databases.

The major activities/achievements of AISI include:

- Support provided to over 24 African countries to develop their own national information and communication infrastructure (NICI) policies, plans and strategies
- Periodic consultations were organised with member states and partners through the following activities:
  - the Global Connectivity for Africa Conference in Addis Ababa, 2 to 4 June 1998 in collaboration with Partners for ICTs in Africa (PICTA)
  - the African Development Forum '99 (ADF'99)<sup>3</sup>, which took place from 24 to 28 October 1999, to bring the message of information technology and development, within the context of globalization and the knowledge-based economy
  - the African preparatory meeting of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Bamako, Mali from 26 to 30 May 2002. In addition to being the first regional preparatory conference, Bamako 2002 has elicited interest among African governments and other stakeholders on the WSIS and the information society in general

The document, *the African Information Society Initiative (AISI): selected activities*<sup>4</sup>, provides a detailed list of the AISI partners and the major activities undertaken.

### **Major Focus Areas**

The major areas of focus of AISI as identified by Africans during several process, including the ADF '99 and Bamako 2002 are:

- Policy and Regulatory Issues
- Applications and Content Development
- Training
- Conferences / Consultations with Member States
- Evaluation

### **The way forward**

As Africa's common vision in promoting the use of ICTs for development, AISI needs to be accorded the necessary attention it deserves by all regional plans and strategies, and global initiatives such as the G8 DOT Force, UN-ICT Task Force, Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD III) of Japan, the WSIS and its preparatory process, and other related initiatives and programmes.

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3 <http://www.uneca.org/adf99>

4 <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/docs/AISIMatrix.doc>