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Critical and Prospective Views on ICTs, Governance and People in Africa

By

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This paper raises several fundamental issues: Are African States as we know them today able to promote accountable and transparent governance? To what extent is electronic governance pre-conditioned by democracy? What are the linkages between competitive governance and a people-centered ICT utilization? Are ICTs a principal driving force to social and economic progress within the context of globalization? Are development processes mainly driven by the struggle for democracy and all the freedoms or by market forces in full competition? In the "information age" paradigm are ICTs the driving force behind capitalist accumulation? Last but not least, how accountable and efficient the main information and communications projects, programs and strategies launched in Africa in the past decade?

I submit that all these questions should be scrutinized through two outstanding hypotheses: H1/ Africa's on-going communications initiatives cannot lead her populations to social and economic progress. H2/ ICTs by and in themselves cannot promote genuine development and democratic governance.

These two hypotheses will be examined against Africa's progressive but steady decline within the framework of globalization and in the face of challenges such as lack of security, rampant neo-colonialism and widespread dictatorship. They will also be discussed in relationship to dominant trends such as telecommunications privatization, poor telecommunications infrastructure and R & D capabilities.

Alternative thoughts will be suggested through the active implementation of four rules of conduct:

- 1/ Stop fighting each other;
- 2/ Place emphasis on education, training and stop the brain drain;
- 3/ Take communications technology seriously and develop social and strategic communications through a dedicated regional communications satellite system;
- 4/ Promote universal access to ICTs especially in educational, agricultural, manufacturing and industrial development areas.