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**REPORT ON PROGRESS MADE IN
ESTABLISHING A WEST AFRICAN WEB SITE
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

ACRONYMS

AISI	African Information Society Initiative of ECA
AGRHYMET	Agro-Hydro-Meteorological Centre of CILSS
ARPA	Advanced Research Project Agency
ARPANET	Advanced Research Project Agency
CILSS	Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (established in 1973)
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
MULPOC	Multinational Programming and Operations Centre of the Economic Commission for Africa; they have now been renamed SRDCs
SRDC	Subregional Development Centre of the Economic Commission for Africa
UEMOA	Union Economique et Monetaire Ouest africaine
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992).
WWW	World Wide Web

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REPORT ON PROGRESS MADE IN ESTABLISHING A WEST AFRICAN WEBSITE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

I: INTRODUCTION

(a) Objectives and Scope of the report

1. This report briefly revisits the recommendations of the first and second meetings of the Intergovernmental Committee of experts (ICE) of the SRDC-West Africa dealing with the facilitation of information exchange and networking through an Internet Web site managed by the SRDC. The objective of the report is to highlight the growing awareness of the increasing importance of the Internet and the use of Websites in promoting and facilitating information exchange and networking as well as conducting research into the various aspects of sustainable development.

2. The report is in two parts. Part I deals with the progress made in the activities undertaken so far and Part II provides an insight into the type of Web site that the SRDC will be developing. It is an effort aimed at increasing the level of networking with member states and other database custodians in order to facilitate access to reliable information on the status of database management in the sub-region to a collective action aimed at sustaining self-reliance and interdependence. Part III draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

(b) Genesis of the report

3. The first and second meetings of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of the Subregional Development Centre (SRDC) for West Africa recommended, among other things, that the SRDC should strengthen its information networking by:

- (a) enabling national focal points, the Director of Planning in the Ministries responsible for Economic Planning, to be increasingly involved in outreach activities of the Centre;
- (b) following up on the financing of the proposed draft project document for the development of environmental management databases in the West African subregion and its submission to partners for funding; and
- (c) considering treating the new information and communications technologies as a policy issue, not only at the level of management and capacity building, but also in relation to the promotion of the equipment industry at the local level.

4. Over the last three years, missions have been undertaken to most of the member states of the SRDC and available information

on these countries revealed four areas of problems, though not all inclusive, within the framework of the new strategic directions of ECA, concerning issues of the various components of sustainable development such as the environment, population dynamics, food security, gender issues and infrastructural development. The three problem'areas are

- (i) inadequate information even for SRDC's programme development and implementation in response to the needs of member states;
- (ii) coordinated approaches for enhancing effectiveness of technical support and advisory services, based on reliable information that would promote the increased use of ECA focal points at the level of member States and the major subregional IGOs;
- (iii) The ineffective harmonization and coordination with the national Coordinator of United Nations system activities and other development partners outside the United Nations system; and
- (iv) The absence of an Internet Website in which the profiles of member states of the SRDC-West Africa could be found, containing the relevant information on sustainable development activities as a follow-up to the Earth Summit of June 1992.

5. During the missions, there was interaction with a wide-range of professionals both in the public sector and within civil society. This provided a fairly reasonable judgement of the thirst for information and the use of the new information and communications technology. In all the countries, discussions were carried out with government officials and civil society organizations, more specifically, NGOs or other associations, as the case may be.

(c) Internet development

6. What is now known as the Internet had its origins in 1962 when the RAND Corporation began research into robot-distributed communication networks for military command and control. It was therefore first conceived in the early 1960s, under the leadership of the Defense Department's Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA). It grew from a paper architecture into a small network (ARPANET) intended to promote the sharing of supercomputers amongst researchers in the United States. In 1969, it connected the first four universities in the United States and researchers at four US campuses created the first hosts of the ARPANET, connecting the

Stanford Research Institute, the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and the University of Utah.

7. Although originally designed to allow scientists to share data and access remote computers, the e-mail quickly became the most popular application. The ARPANET became a high-speed digital post office as people used it to collaborate in research projects and discuss topics of various interests. In 1972, the Internetworking Working Group (INWG) became the first of several standards-setting entities to govern the growing network. In 1973, ARPANET went international with connections to the University of London England and the Royal Radar Establishment in Norway. Between 1974 and 1981, the general public got its first vague hint of how networked computers could be used in daily life as the commercial version of the ARPANET went online. The ARPANET then started to move away from its military/research roots.

8. Advances between 1982 and 1987 saw the creation of TCP/IP as the universal language of all Internet computers. For the first time the loose collection of networks which made up the ARPANET was seen as an "internet" and the Internet as we know it today was born. The mid-80s marked a boom in the personal computer and super-minicomputer industries. The combination of inexpensive desktop machines and powerful, network-ready servers allowed many companies to join the Internet for the first time. Corporations began to use the Internet to communicate with each other and with their customers.

9. By 1988 the Internet had become an essential tool for communications. However, it also began to create concerns about privacy and security in the digital world. New words such as "hacker," "cracker" and electronic break-ins were created. These new worries were dramatically demonstrated on Nov. 1, 1988 when a malicious program called the "Internet Worm" temporarily disabled approximately 6,000 of the 60,000 internet hosts.

10. In 1991, the World Wide Web was born at the University of Minnesota. A team led by computer programmer Mark MaCahill released "gopher," the first point-and-click way of navigating the files of the Internet in 1991. Originally designed to ease campus communication, gopher was freely distributed on the Internet. By 1996, nearly 10 million hosts had gone online.

11. Within 30 years, the Internet has grown from a Cold War concept for controlling the tattered remains of a post-nuclear society to the information superhighway. Just as the railroads of the 19th century created the Machine Age, and revolutionized the society of the time, the Internet takes us into the Information Age, and profoundly affects the world in which we live.

12. Since 1997, many people now telecommute over the Internet, allowing them to choose where to live, based on quality of life, not proximity to work. Many cities view the Internet as a solution to their clogged highways and fouled air. Schools use the Internet as a vast electronic library, with untold possibilities. Doctors use the Internet to consult with colleagues half a world away. And even as the Internet offers a single global village, it threatens to create a 2nd class citizenship among those without access. As a new generation grows up, accustomed to communicating through a keyboard as in person, life on the Internet will become an increasingly important part of life on earth.¹

13. An Internet web page (Home Page) therefore provides the forum, the tools and means of sharing, both in visual and audio mode, ideas, information, experiences with other experts and professionals and develop networks. All that is required is a computer with a modem and access to an Internet Service Provider (ISP). It is one of, if not the most important aspect, of the information technology revolution. For researchers it is an invaluable tool for online publication and diffusion of ideas and information. For the policy and decision-maker it is an essential tool for a comparative analysis of policies and decisions as they are implemented, monitored and evaluated. It is cost effective both financially and in terms of time spent.

II: THE CURRENT STATUS

(a) Keeping up with the Information and Internet Revolution

14. Information on all the countries of the subregion can be accessed on the Internet. There is information mostly on geography, government structures and general information of a tourism nature. Many also have information on the structure of their economies and investment possibilities. Although there is information on the various economic and social indicators, there is little or no information on economic performance and how this is reflected in the social conditions of the people as a basis for evaluating progress towards achieving sustainable economic and social development.

15. This raises the issue of databases for integrated information and development, management of information systems to effectively formulate policy and programmes that are cross-sectoral and inter-departmental. It also raises the issue of the contribution of civil society and the non-governmental sector in building this integrated, multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary database to be accessed through one internet web site.

¹/ This section has benefited from
<http://www.pbs.org/internet/timeline/timeline-txt.html>

16. The role of the state, science, communities, macro-economic policies, the private sector, NGOs and markets needs to be monitored if the true picture of all concerned in the effort toward sustainable development is to be well appreciated. If this is not well done, despite the wealth of documentation that exists on sustainable development since UNCED, there will be continued concerns about the accuracy and validity of the data. Within this framework the problem of the standardization of information could be easily addressed so that questionable information is not used to legitimize certain actions that might influence important investment and management decisions.

17. It is encouraging to note that there is ample evidence that member states and the private sector at the national level are positively responding to the information technology momentum and are initiating related capacity building programmes. The international community represented by various organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, has a key role to play in sensitizing policy and decision-makers about the advantages of investing in the Internet and its use for integrated development management information system. Local expertise and institutional capacity must be strengthened to respond to the challenges that this presents. From these local capacities, management tool such as management software and networking technologies, could be produced for the use of policy and decision-makers.

18. It is important to note that in almost all West African countries there are significant initiatives under way for developing databases with the participation of the UNDP Capacity 21 programme, other UN agencies and development partners. The major intergovernmental organizations (CILSS, ECOWAS and UEMOA) have also been carrying out the same exercise within the framework of their mandates. This is within the implementation of Agenda 21 and other agreements and recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) of 1992. The UNDP therefore has been, or is sponsoring a Sustainable Development Network programme (SDNP) with an Internet component. This is intended to assist in:

- (a) establishing, at the national level, a capacity to generate and exploit information adapted to sustainable decision-making;
- (b) facilitating the use of the new information and communications technology, particularly the Internet;
- (c) increasing the interaction among the various sustainable human development actors and operators; and
- (d) creating at the national level a corps of qualified expertise in the new information and communications technology.

19. The planned operational structure of the UNDP/SDNP programme provides for the progressive setting up of a national network for the exchange of information. This will be based on identifying sectoral activities that are relatively homogeneous to be used as server nodes. Each of these server nodes would constitute an online focal point for the members of the group.

(b) West African countries and their websites

20. Only Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone run their own websites. The remaining web pages can be accessed through sites run by other Internet Service providers (ISPs), important among which is www.africanet.com. The other, also very much used, is www.sas.upenn.edu, which has been created by the Norwegian Council for Africa, as part of its comprehensive effort at strengthening knowledge about Africa and African affairs. . The projects have been developed in cooperation with the information company Gazette, and with the financial support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Country	Some West African country Web sites	Content
1. Benin	http://www.africanet.com/africanet/country/benin/home.htm	Embassies Health & Safety Parks Tour Operators, Climate, Currency Economy Geography History
2. Burkina Faso	http://www.politicalresources.net/burkinafaso.htm	La constitution, Liste des Sites Web du Burkina Faso, Bienvenu au Burkina-Faso
3. Cap Verde	http://www.cvtelecom.cv/dados.html	http://www.umassd.edu/SpecialPrograms/Caboverde/cvccp.html
4. Côte d'Ivoire	http://www.cotedivoire.com/	Economy and government departments
5. The Gambia	http://www.gambia.com/	Economy and government departments
6. Ghana	http://www.ghana.gov.gh/	Economy and government departments
7. Guinea	http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Country_Specific/Guinea.html	Economy and government departments
8. Guinea Bissau	http://www.first-exchange.com/afriguinea.htm	Economy and government departments
9. Liberia	http://www.emulateme.com/liberia.htm	Economy and government departments
10. Mali	http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Country_Specific/Mali.html http://www.emulateme.com/mali.htm	Economy and government departments
11. Niger	http://www.emulateme.com/niger.htm http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Country_Specific/Niger.html	Economy and government departments
12. Nigeria	http://www.nigeria.com/ http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies	Economy and government departments
13. Senegal	http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Country_Specific/Senegal.htm	Economy and government departments
14. Sierra Leone	http://www.sierra-leone.org/ http://www.allstates-flag.com/flags/sl.html	Economy and government departments
15. Togo	http://www.republicoftogo.com http://www.afrika.com/togo/	Economy and government departments

(c) The role of ECA and the SRDC-West Africa

21. As indicated in earlier reports, the strategic directions of the ECA renewal process are focused on a clear vision of Africa's future in a world of rapid technological changes and information revolution which it can use in catching up, as much as possible, with the rest of the world, given the right strategic investment. In pursuit of this vision, it has been necessary to initiate a series of activities such as the development information systems and the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) to promote interaction among and between them and the ECA.

22. Enhancing information exchange and networking is one of the major components of the move by the Commission to strengthen its subregional presence. A strengthened subregional presence means that the SRDCs will, from now on, be equipped with the capacity to perform the following functions

- (a) act as operational arms of the ECA at the country level and a catalyst to enhance the Commission's resources;
- (b) serve as instruments for ensuring harmony between subregional and regional programme orientations and those defined by the strategic directions of the Commission;
- (c) provide advisory services to member states, regional economic communities and subregional development operators;
- (d) facilitate subregional economic cooperation, integration and development;
- (e) promote gender issues;
- (f) act as centres for policy dialogue;
- (g) collect and disseminate information; and
- (h) serve as facilitators of integration activities of organizations of the UN system operating within the subregions.

23. The ECA is to put in place a Knowledge Management Strategy (KMS) that will enhance the Commission's comparative advantage in the region as a generator and disseminator of client-focused policy analysis that is relevant to the developmental needs of its member states. It is also intended to integrate external and internal (Intranet) strategies, and to ensure that the five field offices of the SRDCs, are fully involved in and benefit from the enhanced connectivity that is the driving force of the ongoing effort.

24. The ECA will, in the very near future, be launching the new ECA web supersite and its component home pages and links. The new site of ECA is currently available for review and feedback at: <http://63.81.137.14>. This site is only available in English. However, ECA will soon introduce the site in French and Arabic versions, to cover the three official languages of the United Nations in Africa. Before the site is made available for external review, ECA will ensure that significant components are available in French.

25. The ECA currently connects to the web in the same way that anyone with a computer at home does - namely, by dialing in to a local ISP. This has the disadvantages for a large organisation like ECA. For example, it can often be difficult to get a connection ; or eventif on gets it at all, the connection may drop regularly and the speed of each connection will full. Further, many other and ECA must compete for it through the pipe from Ethiopian Telecommunications to the Internet in the USA with many other users. The bottomline line of all this is that current Internet access is both unreliable and slow.

26. Since October 1999 this has changed. Since then, ECA has begun using a dedicated link to the Internet via direct satellite technology. A Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) earth station is now installed at ECA and is connected via satellite directly to the Internet in the USA. This connection will run at 1024 Kbps or about 25 times as fast as current links. The link is available to all ECA staff and is both fast and reliable, implying a fundamental change in the way that ECA staff produce their work. It will also have a dramatic impact on the dissemination of and access to ECA- generated knowledge.

27. This framework, ECA believes, should provide active support to its member states both in articulating strategies for socio-economic transformation and translating commitments from the regional to the national levels into effective action. This will be the ECA's thrust in fostering subregional and regional cooperation for socio-economic development. This will also be the SRDC's objective in revitalizing subregional and regional cooperation for economic and social development. In this context, specific focus with the available expertise will be on the environment and sustainable development, macro-economic issues, transport and communications, gender issues, population dynamics and development, food security with emphasis on related technology and water resources development.

28. To respond to these information exchange and networking needs, SRDC-West Africa has embarked on a three-pronged approach to building country sustainable development profiles which will give a bird's eye view of the issues involved and how they are being addressed. The second is closely related to the work on sustainable development indicators being undertaken by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The third approach is sectoral, dealing with the implementation of the various conventions (desertification, biodiversity, climate change, etc.), platforms of action and other intergovernmental commitment to member states of the SRDC. To operationalize these actions the SRDC-West Africa now operates a website at <http://www.ca.ne>. This is still under construction and most of the database will be located therein.

III: THE WAY FORWARD : Conclusions and recommendations

29. As earlier stated, an Internet web page (Home Page) provides the tools and means of sharing, both in visual information, experiences with other experts and professionals and develop networks. There is a very high awareness of the importance of the new information and communications technology represented by the INTERNET and electronic mail among young executives. There are also inroads being made into the more conservative policy levels of government and decision-making. As a result, there is a determined effort to deploy resources, though mostly meagre, into it. This awareness is the result of the UNCED process, particularly the work of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and the UNDP Capacity 21 Programme.

30. Effort is will be made to promote the implementation in West Africa of sustainable development program within the context of the various related global conventions and agreements. To achieve this objective the SRDC-West Africa Internet Website will provide a forum for the exchange of policy ideas and results of the implementation of policy decision.

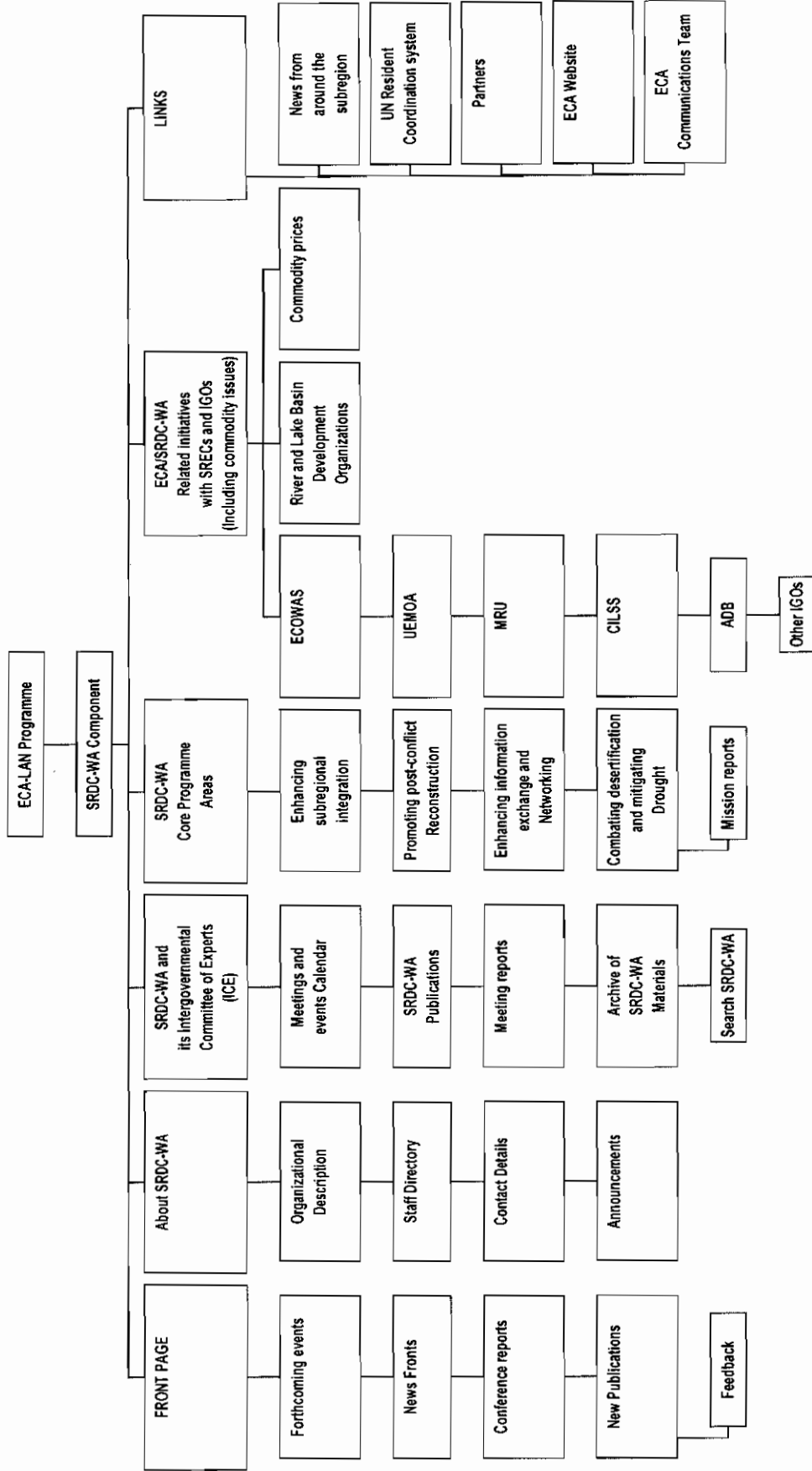
(a) The SRDC-West Africa Website

31. The SRDC-West Africa Website at <http://www.eca.ne> will be redesigned in a manner to be easily interactive with that of ECA so as to enhance the synergy of programme actions from headquarters to the subregional level. In addition to the front page, five pages to the Website are foreseen.

32. The **front page** will introduce the user to the contents of the site and will also contain information on current and forthcoming events as well as issues that need to be brought to the users attention such as 'breaking' information as well as a 'feedback' link for the Centre's interaction with users. On this page will also appear linkages to the content pages about :

- (i) SRDC-West Africa
- (ii) SRDC-West Africa Core programme areas;
- (iii) ECA/SRDC-West Africa initiatives with subregional RECs and IGOs; and
- (iv) Other linkages.

Draft Proposed SRDC-WA Site Architecture



33. The page **about SRDC-West** will include information on the Centre's organizational description, staff directory, contact details of the Centre and announcements that the Centre wishes to make to its users. The **SRDC-WA/ICE** page will contain information on its legislative organs, the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE). This will handle issues relating to meetings and events calendar, the Centre's publications, meeting reports and a link to the archives of the Centre (database).

34. The **SRDC-West Africa Core programme areas page** represents the thrust of the approved work programme of the Centre. Information herein will update the users on events and activities in each of those areas, namely :

- (a) enhancing subregional integration ;
- (b) promoting post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation ;
- (c) facilitating information exchange and networking ; and
- (d) combating desertification and mitigating the impact of droughts.

35. A page is **reserved for ECA/SRDC-West Africa-related initiatives** with the subregional economic communities, the IGOs and river and lake basin organizations. It will include information on the subregion's efforts at establishing stock markets and information on commodity prices.

36. The last page will be devoted to **linkages** for news from the subregion, with the United Nations Resident Coordination system and could be an important link for UN system subregional collaboration. It will also provide the necessary link to the ECA Website and the ECA Communications Team.

(b) Synergy with the ECA Website

37. The ECA intends moving both the Intranet and Internet in the ECA domain (www.uneca.org), to **Lotus Notes**. **Lotus Notes Domino** is a proven platform at ECA into which major development efforts are being invested. The main reasons for moving to Notes are as follows :

- (i) **Co-existence:** Notes neither precludes nor hinders content development in the standard HTML format. Notes and HTML documents/databases can be accessed via a server running either Lotus Domino Server HTTP Stack or IIS (with Domino 5.0). Consequently, the current HTML and Notes content can be made to coexist seamlessly. Transition would similarly be transparent.

- (ii) **Technical support:** The ECA team is largely familiar with Notes and advanced training is imminent in order to provide the technical depth needed to maintain the system. The whole of the UN Secretariat is moving to Notes, meaning that additional technical support will be available.
- (iii) **Operating system:** Notes is Windows NT, UNIX and Netware compatible, which means ECA will have OS independence.
- (iv) **Security and Y2K:** Notes is secure and Y2K compliant and its replication feature allow a site to be located anywhere (physical and logically).
- (v) **Features:** Notes offers a highly agile HTTP engine that accommodates both Notes and HTTP formats.
- (vi) **Integration:** All existing Notes databases at ECA HQ and in SRDCs can be easily integrated and existing mail can be easily accessed via the Internet.
- (vii) **Cost:** Cost would be cut to a minimum due to easier administration, integration and design.

(c) Conclusions and recommendations

38. Within the framework of the ECA/SRDC network and in view of on-going UNDP actions in member States related to sustainable development networks (SDN) based on the new communications technology, the SRDC could serve as a key UN system subregional node. A picture such as the one on page 11 could then emerge.

39. From the development described above, the SRDC-West Africa is in a position to develop and maintain a West African website on sustainable development. This would be based on country profiles which would be updated with data from the member States (focal points in each), IGOs, the UN system and the World Bank. The web site would be interactive to allow for a sustained interaction between the SRDC-West Africa and its member States, RECs and IGOs as well as development partners both within the United Nations system and outside it. This implies the maintenance of :

- (a) an electronic mailing list;
- (b) a network system that will include a **USENET** for User's Network with bulletin boards residing on the Internet. Each bulletin board contains discussion groups, or newsgroups, dedicated to the sustainable development of the subregion ; messages could

also be posted and responded to by readers either as public or private e-mail ;

- (c) Upload procedures whereby documents and text file of meeting documents could be accessed and retrieved by all; and
- (d) Discussion Groups, newsgroup, which would have particular section within the USENET system dedicated to a particular subject of interest on sustainable development in the subregion.

40. The SRDC-West Africa is in the process of preparing guidelines on information exchange and networking which should be finalized and disseminated in the nearest future. It is recommended that:

- (a) at the national level governments should increase investment in IT as a management tool and in so doing strengthen data standardization structures and procedures so as to enhance the viability of information and facilitate the flow of information and to the SRDC-West Africa database;
- (b) when the redesigned SRDC-West Africa Website at www.eca.ne completed, it should be visited as often as possible and suggestions made as to how it could be improved.