ENABLING ICT DEVELOPEMNT IN AFRICA: CONFORMANCE AND INTEROPERABILITY INFRASTRUCTURE

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For a number of reasons, historical or otherwise, some of the ICT systems deployed in emerging markets have either been obsolete in the country of origin or just facing imminent obsolescence with some production lines having been closed – one wonders how such systems can be sustainably maintained. Besides the burden of e-waste thus created, the existence of such systems with their attendant limited compatibility with state of the art systems and accepted practices curtail the extent to which the affected countries can access global ICT wealth. This paper draws from some of the outcomes of ITU Regional Development Forums (RDF) in Africa, notably: "Bridging the ICT Standardization Gap in Developing Countries" held in Kigali, Rwanda (2007) and in Accra, Ghana (26 to 28 May 2008); and from WTSA-08 Preparatory Meeting also held in Accra, Ghana (May, 2008). It also builds on the RDF held in Lusaka, Zambia (May, 2009) where the need for standardization was deepened through recommendations for the establishment of next generation networks (NGN) conformance and interoperability testing centres within the African Region. The paper seeks to reiterate the urgent need for standardization which calls for conformance of systems to standards and which leads interoperability among ICT systems and services; and points out important implications for key ICT stakeholders, namely policy makers, regulators, service providers, vendors and consumers. The role that conformance and interoperability will play in ensuring that all ICT stakeholders are winners is emphasized. It is hoped that this paper will contribute towards strengthening the resolve to move forward and realize the implementation of NGN conformance and interoperability solutions that address the situation in African.

Key words and phrases:

Policy and Regulation, Technical compatibility of systems, Quality of service, Human capacity development, supporting infrastructure, conformance and interoperability test beds, Promotion of standards compliant access to ICT, consumers