



West African regulators agree on common regulatory framework

Creating an environment to nurture ICT

An environment that attracts investment and facilitates growth — that is one of the key factors that must be present in order to promote the development of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. Taking a huge step forward along the path towards achieving such an environment, regulators from 15 West African nations have agreed on a common regulatory framework to govern their national ICT markets.

The agreement marks a turning point for the region, which seeks to create a single market based on the European Union model. The goal of the common regulatory framework is to propel some of the world's most impoverished nations into the global information society. All of the framework's guidelines adopt a market-based approach to the provision of ICT services, and are designed to spur investment and development in the nations concerned: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Regulators hammered out the new framework during a workshop in Accra, Ghana, on 5-7 September 2005, chaired by Major John Tandoh, Acting Director General and Chief Executive Officer of the National Communications Authority of Ghana. More than 100 participants, from both the public- and private sectors, took part in the event, including representatives from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the *Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine* (UEMOA) — or West African Monetary Union, the "Catalysing Access to ICT in Africa" (CATIA), the European Commission, the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Commenting on the new regulatory framework, Major Tandoh said, "These guidelines are in keeping with international best practices, but tailored to the West African market. They will allow us to think globally, and act locally." The guidelines cover interconnection, licensing, numbering, spectrum management, universal access and ICT policy and legislation, and were formally approved by the Third Ordinary General Meeting (OGM) of the West Africa Telecommunications Regulators Assembly (WATRA) on 9 September 2005, hot on the heels of the workshop.

"I am delighted that WATRA has played such an important role in bringing the region together to achieve its goal of creating a harmonized ICT market," said Daniel Seck, WATRA Chairman and Director General of Senegal's regulatory authority, the *Agence de Régulation des Télécommunications* (ART), who chaired the OGM.

"These guidelines offer West Africa a state-of-the-art regulatory framework," commented Hamadoun I. Touré, Director of ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT). "ITU is proud to be associated with such a quality product."



West African regulators approve a framework for a common ICT market

This new West African ICT Market Harmonization project is financed by the European Commission and administered by the ITU's Regulatory Reform Unit. It is the fruit of lengthy consultations with the region's regulators, operators, service providers and civil society, and has benefited from input from a group of internationally renowned regulatory experts from Africa and Europe.

The goal of creating a single, liberalized telecommunications market in the region is shared by both ECOWAS and UEMOA. The guidelines agreed by WATRA will now be submitted to the communications ministers and Heads of State of the member nations of ECOWAS and UEMOA for approval as directives to be applied within the West African region.

"This is a watershed project that has catalysed regional unity, and which we hope will serve as a

model for future African ICT regulatory projects," noted Harry De-Backer, Principal Administrator, Information Society, New Technologies, of the European Commission's Development Directorate-General.

The Istanbul Action Plan, issued in 2002, recognizes the central significance of regulatory reform, which is the focus of the plan's Programme One. The provision of an "enabling environment" for ICT is also one of the stated aims of the Plan of Action decided during the 2003 phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. In line with these goals, the giant stride forward that West Africa has taken in harmonizing its ICT market is likely to bring benefits for the region long into the future.

The full text of the agreed regulatory guidelines is available at <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/treg/Events/Seminars/ITU-EC-Project/Ghana/Ghana.html>

ITU and InfoDev launch online regulation toolkit

Reflecting the rapidly changing environment for information and communication technologies (ICT), nearly 140 new, national regulatory authorities have been established over the last ten years. For those in the developing world especially, the increasing pace of technological change creates the need for a tool that can help regulators anticipate new policies — and have access to impartial and up-to-date information on best practices.

In response, ITU and InfoDev (a multi-donor programme working with the World Bank) jointly developed an online *ICT Regulation Toolkit*, launched on 25 July 2005. The toolkit is a new and expanded version of InfoDev's print publication "Telecom Regulators' Handbook" (published in 2000). Its aim is to provide regulators with a regularly updated source of information and advice on the complex issues they face.

The toolkit consists of a series of modules on key topics, highlighting trends and industry practices. The module on authorization of telecommunication serv-

ices is already available, and further modules are scheduled to become available between late 2005 and early 2006. These will cover legal and institutional aspects of regulation; interconnection, pricing and competition; new technologies and their impact on regulation, and radio-spectrum management.

Each module is based on a core document, which provides a high-level summary of the topic concerned and serves as the framework for a range of online content giving more detailed information through hyperlinks. As well as offering practical advice on a day-to-day basis, the material can also be used for training purposes.

At the launch of the online toolkit, BDT Director, Hamadoun I. Touré said the goal ITU is pursuing with InfoDev is to create a product that will "enjoy premier status among national and regional regulatory agencies, ICT policy-makers and other stakeholders with an active interest in ICT regulation."

The new ICT Regulation Toolkit can be accessed at <http://www.ictregulationtoolkit.org/>