United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

ECA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SECOND PREPCOM

Africa and the WSIS process

Africa's participation to the the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) started with the the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference on the Information Society which was held in, Bamako (Mali) from 26-30 May 2002, and is known as Bamako2002. Africa is the first continent to organize a Regional Conference in line with the framework of the WSIS. Over seven hundred participants took part in the conference, which was organized at ministerial level and was opened by Presidents Wade (as the President in-charge of the ICT component of NEPAD) and Konare (as the convener and host of the Conference).

The conference was preceded by 14 pre-conference workshops, which were held from 26-28 May 2002 and were organized by ECA, other United Nations agencies, international organizations, governments, the private sector and the civil society. The main conference was held from 29-30 May 2002 and was divided into the following four themes, which received input from the pre-conference workshops:

♦ What Africa brings to the Information Society

♦ What the Information Society brings to Africa

♦ What Africa wants to preserve in the Information Society

♦ How Africa would benefit from the Information Society

At the end of the meeting, the conference adopted the Bamako 2002 Declaration (www.uneca.org/aisi/bamako2002), which guides Africa's participation to the various phases of the World Summit in Geneva and in Tunis.

ECA and the WSIS Process

The UN Regional Economic Commissions are members of the High-Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC), which was set up by the United Nations Secretary General[1].

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[1] ECA's participation is led by the Development Information Services Division (DISD), which is spearheading Africa's participation in the preparatory process. DISD organized and participated in several WSIS related activities in the continent and outside.

ECA's leadership was instrumental to the success of the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference. ECA was charged by the Malian authorities to prepare the programme of the conference and select the resource persons and panelists.

ECA was elected as Rapporteur of the conference and later designated, during PrepCom1, by Bamako 2002 Bureau members as the secretariat for the follow up of Africa's participation to the World Summit. ECA was also requested during that meeting by Bamako 2002 Bureau to "ensure that Africa will come up with a common plan of action (by enriching the Bamako Declaration) which will be based on AISI and the NEPAD ICT component".

It was in this context that the Fourth Annual Regional Consultations of UN Agencies Working in Africa was convened from 24-25 October 2002 in Addis Ababa to discuss modalities of cooperation for the implementation of NEPAD's Short-Term Action Plan, which was adopted by the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in July 2002 in South Africa. ECA has been mandated by the UN Regional Agencies Working in Africa as the convener and coordinator for the implementation of the ICT Cluster, which priority programmes deal with projects on the following areas:

- Infrastructure deployment roll-out projects

- Facilitation and human resource development projects

- ICT exploitation and application projects

Specific Proposals and Actions for the Draft Declaration

Based on the implementation of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) – www.uneca.org/aisi -, the NEPAD process and activities resulting from the Bamako 2002 declaration, ECA proposes the following as Africa's core actions for its participation in the Information Society:

1. Deployment of ICT infrastructure, including the adoption of the corresponding policy and regulatory regimes across the continent to build a sound information society.

2. Putting in place and launching strategies for building the information society.

3. Promotion and development of Local Content.

4. Cooperation and collaboration in building the information society in Africa through creative partnerships at the national, regional and international levels.

5. Setting up of a network of experts to build up capacity for the identification, evaluation and adoption and implementation of information society policies and plans.

6. Developing the human and institutional capacities needed for the creation of the information society.

7. Putting in place mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the growth and impact of the information society.

Specific Proposals and Actions for the Draft Action Plan

The following specific actions are proposed by ECA in the follow up activities of the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference:

1. Creating an enabling environment for the development of ICTs through:

- Forging a political commitment through the adoption of ICT policies

- Adoption of National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) Policies and Plans

- Developing NICI implementation strategies where the NICI policies and plans are available

- Removal of regulatory barriers

- Preparation of financing mechanisms for infrastructure deployment and e-applications

2. Building the information society in Africa through the launching of the following e-services and the corresponding strategies such as:

- E-government

- E-Health

- E-commerce

- E-education

- Telecentres and Cybercafes

- Community Centres

- Rural connectivity Centres

3. Promotion of the development of local content. This addresses the role of ICTs for recording, preserving and disseminating the cultural and linguistic heritage of societies, and promoting exchanges through African languages. This can be done through:

- Development of applications that use African Languages/Scripts

- Recording, preserving and disseminating the cultural and linguistic heritage of the African population through the use of multimedia tools

- Exchanging knowledge through African languages

4. Setting up of an ICT intelligence network comprising of experts in the continent and the Diaspora. The network will be in charge of identifying, carrying research and financing new technologies and issues that work for/affect the information society such as:

- Open source software

- Multimedia applications on local languages

- Involvement of civil society, private sector, academia and Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) at all levels of ICT decision making

5. Cooperation and collaboration in building the information society through:

- Creation of networks and sharing of best practices

- Development of training and sensitisation plans that familiarize various stakeholders with new technologies

- Forging partnerships for carrying out the tasks leading to Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005.

6. Building up institutional and human capacity:

- Promoting harmonization of ICT regulations and strengthening of regulatory authorities in the Continent

- Creating awareness of the challenges and impact of the information society among key policy makers (parliamentarians, government ministers, local government officials, CSO, etc.)

7. Developing follow up mechanisms through the establishment of evaluation and monitoring methods and tools.

Selected activities for outputs to Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005

Since the Africa Regional Conference, ECA has been working with its partners in implementing the Bamako 2002 Declaration. Some of the activities/projects underway that are expected to feed into Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005 in the form of outputs under the coordination of ECA are:

1. **ICTs for Regional Integration**

Among the many ICT workshops and fora, which were convened to promote regional integration and cooperation, following Bamako 2002, we can cite the following:

a. The Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS) organized in June 2002 in Bamako, a workshop for west African regulatory agencies to set up the West African Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (WATRA) and discuss harmonization of regulations among the ECOWAS countries.

b. The Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC) organized a workshop in Yaounde, Cameroon, from 11-13 September 2002. The workshop aimed at stimulating ICT programme activities of the regional economic community, for the development of NICI strategies and harmonization of telecommunication regulatory frameworks in the sub-region. A Declaration was passed dealing with issues related to the sub-region's participation in the information society.

2. **ICT Policy and Civil Society.**

Participation of the civil society in the WSIS process is essential if we want to build an inclusive information society. In this regards and in line with the recommendations of the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference, several activities have been held in 2002 or are envisaged to take place from 2003. We can cite a few:

a. A discussion list on **ICT and Governance** was organized from 15 July to 30 September 2002. It addressed the following issues:

•debating the context and definition of e-government/e-governance

•readiness of governments to embrace e-governance

•best practices of e-governance throughout Africa

•identifying a road map for e-governance in Africa

b. A discussion list on the role of **African civil society in ICT Policy development** was launched on 3 October 2002 and is still on going. Issues covered in the discussions include:

•ICT policy and decision-making process

•factors that encourage civil society participation

•factors inhibiting the participation of CSOs in the ICT policy arena

•practical and demonstrable examples and ideas on how ICTs can be effective tools for better governance

c. A discussion list and a website were launched in October 2002 for Bamako 2002 Bureau members to discuss Africa's participation to the WSIS in line with the recommendations of Africa Regional Preparatory Conference.

d. A workshop on the strengthening of Civil Society participation in the WSIS process was held in Addis Ababa in November 2002. Convened by ECA, the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Article 19, the workshop was the culmination of the discussion list on civil society and ICT policy referred to above. It sparked the formation of a network of ICT policy mobilizers dedicated to building an inclusive information society in Africa towards Geneva and Tunis.

The following activities have been confirmed for 2003 as part of the WSIS process:

e. A workshop on **e-governance** will be held from 24-28 February 2003 in Lesotho for Southern African countries.

f. The Third meeting of ECA's **Committee on Development Information** (CODI) will be held from 13-16 May 2003 on the theme of ICTs and Governance

g. A study and a series of workshops and training courses on **Reporting on ICT** for the Media will be organized from 2003 to 2005

h. A network on **ICTs and Higher Education** (VarsityNet) will be launched in 2003 to secure and galvanize the participation of universities in the information society.

3. **The G8 Africa Action Plan**

In the framework of the G8's contribution to the implementation of NEPAD, several activities have been adopted by the G8 Summit. The following ICT programmes are funded by the Government of Canada in support to ICT activities in the AISI, NEPAD and WSIS processes:

a. **The International e-Development Resource Network (IeDRN)**. ECA is working with Industry Canada, on behalf of the Government of Canada on the Development of e-Strategies for Africa in the framework of the International e-Development Resource Network (IeDRN). The IeRDN proposes to offer to African countries policy advise on setting up NICI policies, plans and strategies. The Network will assist individuals and organisations to find, understand and apply the wealth of existing knowledge about ICTs in Africa and worldwide. In this regard, a network of ICT policy experts will be set up to intervene in the framework of the IeRDN.

b. **The Centre for Connectivity in Africa (CCA)**. ECA has started discussions with work with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada to define the objectives and a programme of activities for the proposed Centre for Connectivity in Africa that is expected to be launched in April 2003. CCA is a multi-stakeholder Canadian-led initiative to accelerate uptake, deployment, development and innovation in information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Africa. The CCA will support research, development and innovative uses of ICT applications in education, health, small business development and economic development.

4. **The AISI Radio Series.** They were initiated during the Africa Regional Conference and launched immediately as part of Africa's contribution to the WSIS process. They are aimed at creating greater awareness on the information society, serving as a tool for media practitioners, especially radio broadcasters to engage various groups in debating the role of ICTs in the development process. The series examine people's understanding of the role and impact of ICTs and raise questions on the issues of access and disparities in the African information society. Whilst one of the programmes of the AISI Radio Series provides an overview of the information society in Africa, the other three are based on the state of ICTs in **Ghana**, **Mali** and **Uganda**. Additional AISI Radio Series will be prepared from 2003 to 2005 as a part of Africa's contribution to the WSIS process.