

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA

P. O. Box 3243 Telephone 5517700 Fax: 5517844

**CONFERENCE OF THE MINISTERS
RESPONSIBLE FOR INFORMATION
AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICTs)
OF THE AFRICAN UNION
FIRST ORDINARY SESSION
18 - 20 APRIL 2006
CAIRO, EGYPT**

EXP/ICT/ Rapt/Rpt (I)

REPORT OF THE EXPERTS' MEETING

REPORT OF THE EXPERTS' MEETING

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Meeting of Experts from Member States of the African Union preparatory to the First Conference of African Ministers responsible for Communication and Information Technologies (ICT) was held at Conrad Hotel in Cairo, Egypt, from 18 – 19 April 2006.

II. ATTENDANCE

2. The list of participants is attached as **Annex**.

III. OPENING CEREMONY

3. The opening ceremony was chaired by Mr. Abubakari BABA-MOUSSA, Director of the Infrastructure and Energy Department of the African Union. He welcomed the participants and thanked the Egyptian authorities for the warm hospitality extended to all the delegates and the excellent facilities provided to ensure the success of the Meeting. After recalling the important role of ICTs in the economic development and integration of the continent, as well as the need for Africa to get organized to derive maximum benefits from the ICTs, he briefly touched on how the opening ceremony would be conducted.

4. In her statement, Dr. B. O. TEMA, Director of the Human Resource, Science and Technology Department of the African Union commended the Egyptian Government for the good preparation of the meeting. She recalled the main missions of the African Union and its two Departments in charge of ICT as well as the benefits of ICT in the development and involvement of Africa in the process of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS). Concluding, Dr. B. O. TEMA said that this meeting was part of the organizational process Africa should initiate to enable African stakeholders to work together to give concrete expression to the Africa Regional Action Plan on the Knowledge Economy (ARAPKE), with a view to supporting Africa's development and integration.

5. Ms. Ghada Howaidy, Director of International Relations in the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology on behalf of the Government of Egypt, welcomed the delegates and wished them a pleasant stay. She recalled the purpose of the meeting which, she said, provided a great opportunity to discuss how best to develop ICT in Africa.

6. Ms. Ghada intimated that during the past few years, Africa had invested enormous resources mainly to develop information communications infrastructure. That notwithstanding, Africa, she said, should continue to exert great efforts to catch up with the rest of the world, adding that the contribution of the ICT to the development of Africa and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) should feature permanently and prominently in our work programme in the years to come. Ms. Ghada concluded by saying that the Conference of Ministers should be an opportunity for identifying and focusing on African priorities with regard to ICT. In that connection, she informed the meeting that Egypt would continue to offer ICT training scholarships and would also propose a regional leadership training programme in ICT.

IV. ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

7. The Bureau was elected as follows:

Chairman	-	Egypt
1 st Vice Chairman	-	Cameroon
2 nd Vice Chairman	-	Malawi
3 rd Vice Chairman	-	Gambia
Rapporteur	-	Kenya

V. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

8. The Agenda which was adopted with slight amendments to include a presentation of the Doha Meeting (CMDT-06) is attached as **Annex**.

9. The adopted work programme is also attached **as Annex**.

VI. PROCEEDINGS

Agenda Item No. 5: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE AFRICAN UNION MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE - Doc.AU/EXP/ICT/2 (I)

10. The African Union made a presentation of the proposed structure (AU/EXP/ICT/2 (1)). The main highlights of this presentation are as follows:

11. The holding of this Ministerial Conference is a culmination of a number of activities, both at the regional and international levels regarding the WSIS process and the African Regional Action Plan for the Knowledge Economy (ARAPKE).

12. The decision of the Executive Council (EX.CL/DEC.258 (VIII), on the WSIS report and ARAPKE, authorizes the African Union Commission to convene a meeting of ministers responsible for ICT with the participation of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other partners.

13. The objectives of this Conference are;

- a. Formalize and institutionalize the African Ministerial Conference on ICT;
- b. Develop implementation and follow-up mechanisms for the African Regional Action Plan for the Knowledge Economy;
- c. Discuss resource mobilization and capacity building.

14. The meeting underscored the need to acknowledge the work of the different technical groups that exist and have been actively involved in the WSIS preparatory meetings. These include;

- The Bamako Bureau
- The African Technical Advisory Committee on the African Information Society Initiative (AISI)
- Different Experts Groups

15. The proposed structure is as follows;

1. The Ministerial Conference
2. The Ministerial Bureau
3. The Steering Committee
4. The Working Groups

16. Each of the structures has a clearly defined mandate and membership.

17. Following the presentation, delegates commended the African Union for the good initiative aimed at the establishment of the Ministerial Conference and made the following observations:

- i. The proposed structure is pertinent, but there is need to review the mandate and membership of the Steering Committee and the Working Groups in accordance with the African Union tradition. There is need to qualify the status of an observer and

a member of the proposed Steering Committee and the Working Groups.

- ii. The position and role of the experts are not reflected in the structure. There is need to differentiate between the role of the Experts and that of the Steering Committee.
- iii. The proposed structure is a result of the WSIS process, but the structure does not reflect the eleven WSIS Tunis guidelines for implementing the WSIS agenda.
- iv. In the preparations leading up to the WSIS summits, national and regional coordinators played a key role in defining an African Agenda for the WSIS summits; however, these coordinators are not reflected in the proposed structure.
- v. Currently Ministers meet at the level of Regional Economic Communities and there exist similar structures, dealing with ICTs, similar to what is being proposed by the African Union. There is need to establish linkages between these structures.
- vi. Noting the rapid development of the ICT sector, the proposal to hold Ministerial Conferences once in every two years seems unrealistic. The Ministerial Meeting should be held more frequently.
- vii. The role of NEPAD in the proposed structure needs to be clarified.
- viii. Concern was expressed over the ability and capacity of the African Union to support the proposed ministerial structure. The Ministerial Conference should make proposals to the Heads of State to strengthen the capacity of the Commission in this regard.

18. In response, the African Union Commission made the following clarifications;

- i. The African Union regulations allow for the formation of the Ministerial Conference, but are silent on the inherent structures. However, the proposed structure is not a new creation but a reflection of other established Ministerial Committees within the African Union framework.
- ii. According to the African Union rules, an experts meeting precedes a Ministerial Conference, which is different from the proposed Steering Committee meeting.

- iii. The African Union is in the process of harmonizing and regularizing the mandates of the different RECs and specialized organizations.
- iv. Concerning the national coordinators, the proposed structure does not prescribe the nomination of members to the respective committees. It is incumbent upon Member States to propose their own nominees.
- v. NEPAD is a programme of the African Union. In fact the Commission and NEPAD are working together to harmonize their activities.
- vi. The inclusion of the civil society, the private sector and other partners is to emphasize the fact that we are in partnership with them.

19. After further deliberations on the presentation made by African Union, the Chairperson proposed the setting up of *ad hoc* committee to consider the membership and mandate of the Steering Committee and the Working Groups.

20. After the discussions by the *ad hoc* committee the proposed structure of the ICT Ministerial Conference was submitted to the plenary which adopted it with amendments as contained as **Annex** to this Report.

**Agenda Item No. 6: Presentation and Consideration of the
Implementation of the African Regional
Action Plan on Knowledge Economy
(ARAPKE) – Doc.AU/EXP/ICT3 (I)**

21. DOCUMENT NO. AIS/EXP/ICT/3 (I), attached hereto as **Annex**, was presented by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The main points covered by the presentation were:

- Background and process of elaboration of the Action Plan;
- Framework of the Action Plan which includes implementation of the key Accra commitments adopted at the Second African Regional Preparatory Conference for the WSIS (February 2005);
- Effective implementation of the Action Plan which for every commitment requires 6 variables (objectives, strategic actions,

time frame, partners, indicators of achievement, expected impact) in the form of a matrix to facilitate evaluations);

- Descriptive model of project selection criteria;
- Mobilization of resources and partners for the funding of ARAPKE;
- Follow-up and evaluation mechanisms of the Action Plan.

22. The Delegates expressed their gratitude to the agencies and partners involved in the preparation of the ARAPKE and made the following observations:

- The possibility to extend the submission date for projects in order to accommodate countries that had not submitted their projects;
- The need to define clearly the role of the development partners who should be informed of such role in advance;
- The risk that the structures proposed by ARAPKE and the African Union might overlap.

23. In response, the Representative of ECA made the following clarifications:

- The ARAPKE project will be managed through the Ministerial Conference Structure proposed by the AU. The Steering Committee proposed in the Ministerial Conference structure will decide on the project selection criteria, while taking note of the national and regional development priorities;
- Currently ARAPKE has 89 projects submitted by Member States and other stakeholders. The priority is to implement the Action Plan, however, the decision to extend the deadline of project proposal submission will be decided by the Ministerial Conference.
- ARAPKE takes stock of existing ICT Projects, and will not duplicate the current initiatives, but promote the sharing of the best practices between regions.

24. Egypt offered to host the Conference on the Mobilization of Funds for ARAPKE in December 2006.

**Agenda Item No. 7: ICT Initiatives of the African Union
Commission**

A. African ICT Week

25. The African Information and Communication Technologies Week (AICTW) was launched for the first time during the run-up to the second Phase of WSIS Summit in Tunisia and it will be held every year from 14 to 20 November, with November 14 celebrated as "Paperless Day".

26. The AICTW aims at providing a platform to create awareness about the opportunities, challenges and benefits derived by the adoption of ICTs.

27. The objectives of the AICTW include:

- To promote the right of all to have equal access to ICT value added services;
- Bridging the digital divide;
- Boosting security and trust in the sectors which rely on the use of information networks;
- To develop, maintain and stimulate people's curiosity, interest and enjoyment in techniques;
- To attract new investments in the ICTs market.

28. The activities marking the AICTW include the African Paperless Day, the AICTW Management Task Force, Online AICTW Week Forums and promotion of the AICTW.

B. Project to create a Pan-African e-Network

29. Initiated in cooperation with the Indian Government, the project aims at connecting 53 Member States of the African Union by satellite network (VSAT) and fibre optics to provide mainly Tele-Medicine and Tele-Education services.

30. The main component of the project will entail installation of VSAT equipment and capacity building. India has committed a budget of about US\$ 55 million over five years for the supply, installation, operationalization and maintenance of the equipment.

31. With regard to the implementation of the project, the major partners, namely the Member States, India and the African Union Commission have responsibilities which are described in the agreements that have already been transmitted to the Member States for information and signature.

32. In addition, a Steering Committee and Technical Sub-Committees composed of regional and international organizational experts and the RECs have been set up. Experts from Member States that have signed the agreement to participate in the project are invited to take part in the activities of the Technical sub-committee for the implementation of the project. All Member States and partners are invited to support the implementation of the project.

Agenda Item No. 8: INTERVENTIONS BY NIGERIA AND PARTNERS

A. NIGERIA

The Delegate from Nigeria recalled the various meetings of the African Ministerial Committee on telecommunications and the agreement to define a structure of the Ministerial Conference, from which the African Union can build on. He said that the structure is similar in some areas with the one proposed by the African Union Commission. He also emphasized the need to clearly define the relationship between the proposed ICT Ministerial Conference, the existing African Union institutions and other partners.

B. EUROPEAN UNION.

33. The presentation made by the representative of the European Union highlighted the following point:

- The European Union is actively involved in ICT4D Initiatives in Africa both at bilateral and multilateral levels;
- Currently E.U. funds are made available through the European Development Fund (9/10)'
- The funding of projects is approved through the National Authorizing Officers and in line with the country strategy papers;
- The African Union may be recognized as a development partner of the European Union. Both institutions are working on modalities of mutual cooperation;
- In fact direct support of the ARAPKE projects can be channeled through the African Union.

Item 9: Consideration of the Draft Cairo Declaration

34. The Cairo Declaration was presented by the Africa Union and discussed by the meeting. The Draft Declaration in its amended form is attached as **Annex**.

35. One Delegation enquired as to the process that would be used in selecting the representatives of civil society and private sector in the working groups. In response, it was clarified that the modalities for selection of such representatives would be determined by the Ministerial Conference upon the proposal of the AU Commission.

36. During the adoption of the Declaration, the Delegation of South Africa entered a reservation on the operative paragraph three(3) relating to the undertaking to implement ARAPKE.