

Workshop on Information Society Indicators

SCAN-ICT Phase II

Port Louis, Mauritius, 24 January 2006

Statement by the United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Makane Faye

The Minister of Information and Communication Technology,

The Director, Mauritius Statistical Office,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a special pleasure for me and for ECA to address you all at this Workshop on Information Society Indicators jointly organized with the Government of Mauritius.

May I convey the warm greetings of the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Mr. Abdoulie Janneh and his best wishes for the success of our deliberations. I would also like to thank the Statistics Office for accepting to collaborate with ECA in this important exercise whose output is targeting at providing decision makers in the country with qualitative information on the application and utilization of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ICTs have now become an enabling tool to enterprises, individuals, firms and communities in developed nations. They are critical ingredients in addressing social, economic and political challenges facing Africa and offer unique opportunity to move forward with greater efficiency and imagination. The successful deployment of ICTs can contribute to the development of knowledge societies in all nations of the continent, bridging the digital divide.

Distinguished participants,

The information society is one of the most potent forces driving our development. That was why in 1996, ECA and others – multilateral, bilateral and non-Governmental institutions, as well as representatives of the private sector and African Member States – launched the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) as an action framework that has been the basis for ICT activities in Africa ever since. Constituting a fundamental part of the AISI initiative is the formulation and development of a National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plan in every African country, which provides an integrated set of decisions, guidelines, laws and other mechanisms for the sustainable development of the information society in Africa. AISI remains the cornerstone of ECA's activities to promote information technology as a means to accelerate African economic and social development. National information and communication plans are frameworks within which we, at ECA, design and deliver support to our member States through advisory services, seminars, workshops and partnerships. To date, ECA has been

working with over thirty five countries assisting them in initiating and developing their national information and communication strategies and plans. We hope that when I will meet the Ministry of Information Technology tomorrow, Mauritius will be part of the countries, which would be getting support from ECA on e-strategy development.

Distinguished participants,

The efforts that are being made in the continent to harness ICTs for development can only bear fruits if we manage to design and implement effective and appropriate tools that would enable us to measure the impact of ICTs on various sectors of the economy and the people at large. The fact that there are more demands for less and limited resources of development in Africa necessitates the utilization of such tools. Empowering decision makers at all levels by providing them with timely and relevant information about the application and utilization of ICTs will enable them to identify the gap and plan future course of actions. It also facilitates the use of improved mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of ICT activities in the region and help design appropriate research and development strategies. Unfortunately, reliable basic indicators to gather and consolidate data on the impact of ICTs in the region are lacking. In most African countries there is a lack of basic information on key ICT and related economic and social indicators, as well as on ICT-related activities.

It was in this context that the Scan-ICT programme was launched in November 2000 as a collaborative project between the Acacia programme of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and ECA, with financial support from the European Union (EU) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD). It monitors the penetration, impact and effectiveness of ICT applications in pilot countries across Africa, providing added value to the AISI implementation at the national, regional and global levels. The Scan-ICT project is a multi-partnership initiative that seeks to build support for the phased development of a comprehensive African capability to define, collect and manage key information needed to support the growing investment in ICTs as well as the transition of Africa to an Information Society. In addition, Scan-ICT describes an opportunity to build capacity in Africa -- the capacity for Africa to influence ICT investments, to extend their impact, to develop sound policies and to encourage the development of made in Africa solutions, applications and content. The goal is to create a pan-African ICT network that would collect, analyse and disseminate all levels of ICT related knowledge in an open manner.

Now that the programme has entered its fifth year of implementation as a pilot and that it's evaluation by African researchers, regulators and statisticians has found it useful for implementation at a larger scale with full implication of National Statistical Offices, we welcome additional partnerships from Finland and hope that information that would be obtained from the ICT indicators gathering exercise would go beyond an inventory of the physical and infrastructure aspects of ICTs but will

include qualitative data on the impact created by ICTs on the economy, labor and policy. It is only upon the acquisition and utilization of this type of data that planners and decision makers could determine the position of Africa and then come up with strategic ICT development plans for future endeavors. Based on the set of ICT indicators adopted by African countries at the second African Regional Preparatory Conference for the WSIS, held from 2 - 4 February 2005 in Accra (Ghana), and the lessons learnt in the first phase of the project, an improved methodology for Scan-ICT Phase II was developed by ECA for use by the implementing countries. The Government of Finland and ECA launched the second phase of the project in June 2005. The countries selected to participate in the second phase of Scan-ICT include Cameroon, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan and Swaziland. I understand that Mauritius has started gathering ICT statistics to pave the way for informed decisions of policymakers and the Statistical Office and the Ministry of Information Technology need to be congratulated for this exercise.

Distinguished participants,

To conclude, it is ECA's hope that this workshop will result in a better understanding of all stakeholders of the process of collecting, processing and disseminating information society statistics and will strengthen the capacity of the Statistical Office in delivering the expected outputs.

I wish you successful deliberations.

I thank you.