

## DECLARATION OF THE ICT FOCUS GROUP<sup>1</sup>

The ICT Focus Group made the following observations:

1. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) could have substantial impact on regional cooperation and integration if the right policies, programmes and mechanisms are put in place. Therefore regional cooperation and integration efforts should mainstream information society and digital inclusion issues in their plans and programmes
2. Information and communication technologies could improve institutional information management, intra-institutional communication between regional cooperation institutions, promote trade, financial cooperation and efficiency in key sectors such as agriculture and education. Likewise regional cooperation could foster economy of scale that increases Africa's collective bargaining position, improve compatible standards and attract investment.
3. The niche for ICTs as per regional integration also lies in using these technologies to strengthen the operations of the sub-regional institutions and facilitate their operations and activities and service delivery in accordance with their mandate.
4. The Focus Group identified five areas of particular importance:
  - Policy and Regulatory Integration
  - Infrastructure Development
  - Capacity Strengthening
  - Partnership and Regional Cooperation
  - Mainstreaming ICTs in all aspects of regional integration
5. The Group also emphasised the need to take into account the crosscutting issues of content development and gender dimension in all areas of ICT policy development and implementation.

**The following specific recommendations were made in respect to the above priority areas:**

### ***I. Policy and Regulatory Integration***

6. There is a need for the development of national ICT strategies, strengthening and harmonization of policy and regulatory frameworks. The creation regional strategies would enable Africa to build economy of scale for developing its infrastructure and content, for monitoring and evaluation and increasing Africa's negotiation at global levels.

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<sup>1</sup> This report is a summary of inputs from four sources; namely the (1) pre-forum online discussion on ICT and regional integration January – February 2000 (2) Pre-forum workshop on ICT and regional Integration, 3-4 March 2002 (3) ICT focus Group meeting, 5 March 2002 (4) Report on issues pertinent to ICTs from the Focus Groups Breakout Sessions.

7. There is a need for regional regulatory integration by creating and strengthening of the community/associations of regulators to facilitate cross-boarder interaction, market enlargement and harmonization policies at sub-regional and regional levels.

8. There is a need for strengthening regional institutions to participate effectively in the global ICT and decision-making fora like ICANN, WTO, WIPO, ISOC etc. Specifically need to consider issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights and the necessary capacity that would need to be developed in African countries to address this issue. A regional community of practice on ICT governance and negotiation should be established.

## ***II. Capacity Strengthening***

9. There is a need for building the capacities of Regional Economic Communities and the universities in knowledge management and in ICT for development issues to create a critical mass of experts that advocate for promote and facilitate regional cooperation and integration.

10. There is a need for extension of the Scan-ICT project to cover best practices and success stories in the deployment and exploitation of ICTs in support of regional integration initiatives. Indicators on leadership, vision, commitment and accountability in the implementation of ICT policies and programmes at national and regional levels should be included in the Scan-ICT initiative.

11. An observatory on ICT and regional integration should be established to research, monitor, scan, pool, evaluate and disseminate progress, trends, success stories and knowledge to stakeholders. The Diaspora could play a significant role in pooling and disseminating information on global ICT governance that has relevance to Africa.

12. Regional policy research on ICT and regional integration should be undertaken to guide policy formulation to evaluate the effectiveness of cooperation.

13. There is a need to promote the application of ICTs in the key sectors such as education, agriculture, public administration, business and trade and health at regional levels to leverage from cross-boarder cooperation. For example: in health, need to use of ICTs in the fight against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, developing regional telemedicine programmes and in education, need to promote regional initiatives such as Schoolnet Africa, Varsitynet, Out of School Youth Network, and Virtual Universities.

14. There is a need for regional cooperation in the area of content development as a cross-cutting issue that takes into account the issue of language, the capturing of indigenous knowledge; improving African's presence on the Net; sharing of African's scientific and research output and development of content-specific applications of relevance to key sector such as health, education, agriculture and culture.

### ***III. Infrastructure Development***

15. Member States should give priority to the development of their information and communication infrastructure. This will include the setting up of sub-regional backbones, exchange and interconnection points.

16. There is a the to address human resource development as crucial for the development, deployment and exploitation of ICTs within the society and economy

17. Need to look at alternative technologies (like wireless, satellite-based and other low cost transmission technologies) as part of process for facilitating universal access. Mechanisms for sharing of bandwidth within the sub-regions also need to be looked at as part of facilitating sub-regional and regional interconnectivity.

### ***IV. Promoting Partnership and Cooperation***

18. Need to use existing framework like the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) and other similar frameworks like the UN-ICT Task Force to facilitate the sharing of national and sub-regional experiences and best practices in the area of ICT exploitation and deployment. A regional information society knowledge exchange network should be established.

### ***V. Mainstreaming ICTs in all Aspects of Regional Integration***

19. Gender mainstreaming in all areas of ICT policy development and implementation need to be taken on board at all levels of policy formulation and implementation.

20. On fiscal and monetary policy issues, need to set up common tariffs for ICT products and services across borders as a key component of the harmonization process at sub-regional and regional level. Also need to encourage cost sharing in executing joint projects at sub regional and regional level, particularly financing strengthening sub regional and regional backbones to enhance connectivity in the region.

21. The role of the private sector in development of ICTs and its participation in national and sub-regional ICT initiatives need to be encouraged. For example, ICTs could be used to facilitate existing national and sub-regional private sector networks in the area information exchange and business transactions.

22. There is the need for harnessing ICTs to support regional parliamentary interactions to maximize resources and improve flow of knowledge and to outreach

23. In the area of human rights and law, the role of ICTs in governance should be highlighted in relevant regional conferences and ICTs should be used to improve education for peace and conflict resolution in Africa.

24. In relation to the civil society, it is recommended that ICTs could be deployed to promote awareness on national and regional initiatives pertinent to regional cooperation. And there is the need to involve the community in the ICT for development process at the national and sub-regional levels

25. Efforts should be made to integrate physical infrastructure such as transport, communications through ICTs to leverage from the speed, accessibility and efficient transactions.

26. There is a need for effective use of ICTs for promoting dialogue on regional integration, for raising awareness on peace, security and governance, the African Union, NEPAD and for the implementation of programmes in support for regional cooperation.

27. There is need to use ICTs to communicate with the core constituency and member States of the Regional Economic Communities and to facilitate information exchange between the SROs, Supra-regional organizations and the United Nations system.