X INFOPOVERTY WORLD CONFERENCE

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- **INTRODUCTION: A new landscape for ICT in Developing Countries**

  We are witnessing an impressive growth in access to ICTs in Africa with a mobile penetration that rose from less than 2% in 2000 to around 30% today, and a mobile market growing at twice the rate of the global one.

  The regulatory reforms are creating favourable environments to foster competition, private investments and reduce costs. New technologies are being introduced, from wireless solutions to fibre optic networks. This opens opportunities for African countries to leapfrog into the knowledge economy.

  But a lot of gaps still remain, and a lot of disparities exist between and within countries. If considerable progress has been made in spreading mobile telephony, the situation is far from being satisfactory for internet access, broadband connectivity and advanced services. Because of lack of infrastructures, high tariffs and limited computer literacy, for example Africa counts today only 2.5% of the world's internet subscribers and less than 1% of the broadband subscribers!

- **What are the main action lines for the EU?**

  Governments have a prime responsibility and should intensify reforms and resources to exploit the potential of both mobile technologies and next generation networks.

  EU has a lot of experience and best practice to share, and is committed to support African institutions on the policies and programmes they need to set-up and implement. We have an instrument to do this: **Africa-EU Partnerships on Infrastructures** (for supporting the rolling-out of trans-national physical backbones), and the **Partnership on Science, Information Society and Space** (to support complementary capacities).

  With these Partnerships now in place, we have at our disposal for the first time a comprehensive institutional environment to develop concrete actions and further promote the existing ones, especially by federating stakeholders to avoid fragmentation of initiatives and dilution of resources.

In particular, we are going to support cooperation initiatives developed on a pan-African level by the Programme for Infrastructures Development in Africa and the African Regional Action Plan for the Knowledge Economy.

- **Let me take concrete examples of cooperation:**

  AfricaConnect which support the development of regional research and education networks and their interconnection with the European GEANT2 network;

  AXIS, for the connectivity of Internet Infrastructure in Africa;

  ALICT, the pan-African ICT training programme, implemented by GeSCI, the Global eSchools Initiative;

  African Virtual Campus that is the pan-African e-learning programme, initial deployment of 11 virtual campuses in West Africa, implemented by UNESCO;

  African Youth ICT4D network: African multimedia learning centres targeting the youth + incubators funds for young entrepreneurs.

These projects come on top of the on-going HIPSSA initiative as support to regional ICT regulatory frameworks. Let me just flag the significant dynamics created by the 8th Partnership in the research domain, with Africa being now the 1st international partner in FP7, with a current total of 429 participations and with the ICT/FP7 programme counting 56 African participations to-date, 4 times the number of participations of the previous programme (IST/FP6) achieved over 5 years.

- **EU's effort in the Research area for ICT**

  The European Union has always been very active in the Research area for ICT, for example the Research ICT Africa Network investigates on ICT policy and regulation that responds to national, regional and continental needs. It has already provided strong analysis to develop innovative and appropriate ICT policies and effective implementation for sustainable development. It would be important that more African teams take part in new Research projects. One of the most successful projects that I would like to mention here is **Digital World**: the aim was to study low-cost ICT technologies to deploy in developing countries, and more specifically:

  1. Mobile Web for Social Development;
  2. Low cost information access devices;
  3. Low cost broadband access and infrastructure;
  4. Dissemination and outreach are also of high importance.

In short we believe that the differential for development comes from innovation regardless of the sophistication of technologies, therefore in developing countries, de facto, we are now promoting the notion of **Low Cost ICT** affordable for developing communities.

- **<u>What are the new steps put forward by the EU</u>**?

  The principles we would like to propose for the **next EU/INFSO Action Plan** (2011-2013) are the following:

  1. focus the priorities as much as possible on a **limited set of concrete objectives**, in line with the 4 axes of the current Partnership 8 (regulation, human resources, content and applications, research and education networks) and keep the complementarities with the Partnership on Infrastructures;

  2. identify the key priorities in liaison with private sector objectives, notably regarding the exploitation of mobile technologies, promotion of mobile application and services, and put the emphasis on local innovation and incubators in order to foster technology;

  3. increase of technology, capacity building as well as business innovation. This is in line with one of the objectives of the **EU Framework Programme for Research and Development, Implementation Technologies**, that is derived from the European living lab experience in order to transfer the concept to developing countries.

  The next meeting of the JEP-8 for Science, Information Society and Space will be at the same period and location of the IST-Africa 2010 Conference, 19 - 21 May 2010, in Durban, South Africa.

- **<u>CONCLUSION</u>**

  Africa is a continent of big challenges but offering immense opportunities. There is no doubt that bridging the digital divide will require the widest mobilisation of stakeholders and technology providers. But once again, what is important is to act in a coordinated way to maximise impact of our initiatives on the ground**.**

Thank you!

BACKGROUND:
- Infopoverty-Agenda;

- Meeting with Finnish MFA Delegation, DG INFSO - 10th March 2010;
- Africa-EU Partnership on Science, Information Society and Space;
- Casa Africa: Seminar on "The Future of Africa-EU Strategic Partnership in the Run-Up to the   Third Summit";
- EuroAfrica-ICT Forum, Brussels, CCAB – 25th March 2009;
- ICT & Global Poverty. Elements for an International perspective;
- Global Forum 2009, 19th October – Bucharest, ICT for Development, Access, Empowerment, Partnership.
- www.digitalworldforum.eu