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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE SECOND PHASE OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS-II)

TUNIS (16-18 NOVEMBER 2005)

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I   Introduction

In its Resolution 56/183 of 21 December 2001, the General Assembly of the United Nations welcomed the resolution of the Council of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in which the Council endorsed the proposal put forward by the Secretary-General of the ITU for the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society in two phases: the first phase in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 and the second phase in Tunisia. The General Assembly also invited the ITU to assume the leading management role in the Executive Secretariat of the Summit and its preparatory process, in cooperation with other interested organizations and partners.

At the Summit of Maputo in July 2003, the Executive Council of the African Union expressed concern about preparations for WSIS and participation of Africa in this important event.

During the 5th Ordinary Session in 2004, the Executive Council in its last Decision EX.CL/Dec.118 (v) commended the able participation of Africa in the first phase of WSIS and asked the African Union Commission to participate in a more concrete and visible way in the preparatory process of the stage of Tunis and to make report on the next sessions.

2.   The First Phase of WSIS 2003

2.1.   Main Outputs:

The first Phase of WSIS was organized from 10th to 12th December 2003 in Geneva (Switzerland). A Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action constitute its outputs. The following issues are articulated in these two documents:

   a. The necessity to conceive and to set up networks, facilities and services that will be accessible and easily approachable at low cost;

   b. Necessity for every nation to reinforce capabilities in education, research and development, to allow them to participate in the Information Society;

   c. The necessity to ensure the security of networks and information to enhance user trust in the use of ICT;

   d. The need to establish an enabling environment for the development of ICT at all levels (national, regional and international);

e. The need to address questions around Internet governance in democratic and transparent ways through international and multilateral networks;

f. Membership in the Alliance of Numerical Solidarity offered as guarantee of international collaboration in the field of ICT, created by Africa under the name of Digital Solidarity Fund.

2.2. Unresolved Issues:

Important issues such as Internet governance and the financing of the development of ICT were left unsettled by the Summit of Geneva through lack of consensus. The creation and financing mechanism of the Digital Solidarity Fund were also not completed as required by the members.

The Summit asked the Secretary General of the United Nations to create a Group a Working Group on Internet Governance- WGIG to study the question of Internet Governance and make proposals to be presented for decision by the Summit of Tunis. The Summit also asked for the creation of a Task Force to examine the mechanisms of financing and report to the second phase of WSIS Tunis.

2. African Participation in The First Phase of WSIS

The Ministerial Conference held in Dakar from 19th to 20th April 2004 assessed the participation of the continent in the Geneva phase of WSIS. The Ministers were of the opinion that there was balanced representation in the group that met. They sought to know if compromises could be made on the points of divergence such as Internet Governance, financing of the development of ICT and actualization of the Digital Solidarity Fund. The meeting of Dakar noted a weakness in the coordination of preparatory activities, which undermined the opportunity for Africa to defend its proposals better.

3. Preparation for the Second Phase of WSIS

3.1. Preparation at the Global Level

The format for the preparation of the second phase of the WSIS Summit is generally the same as that of the first phase. It involves the following:

a. Groups & Task Forces: Working Group on the Internet Governance (WGIG), Task-Force on Financing Mechanisms (TFFM), Group of Friends of the Chair (GFC);

b. PrepCom (preparatory committee) Meetings: PrepCom-1 held in Hammamet in Tunisia from 24th to 26th June 2004; PrepCom-2 held from 17th to 25th February 2005 in Geneva; PrepCom-3 scheduled to be held from 19th 30th September 2005 in Geneva.

c. Preparatory Regional Conferences according to geopolitical, cultural and linguistic groupings and also Conferences Sub-Regional (case of Pan-Arab Conference in Cairo from 8th to 10th May 2005).

The main outcome of PrepCom-1 is the decision concerning structure, which was presented to, and adopted by PrepCom-2. The outcomes of PrepCom-2 are the adoption of a structure for the Summit of Tunis and an agreement on the creation of a Digital Solidarity Fund.

3.2. Preparation at the African Level.

Organization

African Preparation was primarily organized around the Regional Conference of Accra (February 2nd to 4[th,] 2005); the Bamako Bureau outcome; participation in the meetings of PrepCom-1 and PrepCom-2; Participation at Pan-Arab Conference (8th to 10th May 2005, Cairo). The mechanism set up by African Countries to prepare for the 2nd phase of the Summit is as follows:

1- From the group of Bamako: Bamako Bureau established during the African preparations for the first session commenced at the African Regional Meeting Preparatory to the WSIS held in Bamako in May 2002 to prepare the African positions for the WSIS. This group consists of representatives from governmental experts, Civil Society, Private Sector, youth, women, and others.

2- From The Ministerial Committee set up in Dakar in 2004: Having been constituted by 8 Member Countries initially, the Committee re-formed in Accra and consists of 15 members: South Africa, Algeria, Egypt, Gabon, Gambia, Congo Brazzaville, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda, Senegal, Tunisia.

Main Outputs

The main outputs of the African preparation process are the Accra Commitments and the African Regional Action Plan on the Knowledge Economy (ARAPKE) adopted in Cairo.

Accra Commitments involve the following:

a. The major principles underpinning the African information society.
b. Development guidelines.
c. Resource mobilization, including human resources.
d. International cooperation.
e. Operational aspects; road to Tunis, ICT implementation strategies, financial mechanisms, Internet governance, partnership, prospects and the way after Tunis.

The African Union was asked to look for support from other regions of the world for financing of the Digital Solidarity Fund and to assist the Ministerial Committee by coordinating the positions of African Governments before and during the Summit of Tunis.

African Plan of Action

The Regional Plan of Action of Africa defines the lines of action to be implemented for every key element of commitments of Accra. These key elements are:

i.   Facilities and access;
ii.   Strategy and the policy of development of WSIS at national and regional level;
iii.   Indicators of the of Information Society
iv.   The strengthening of capabilities;
v.   Research and development;
vi.   Internet Governance;
vii.   Multi-stakeholder partnership.

The Role of the African Union Commission

In response to the resolution requesting more concrete participation, the Commission got involved in coordinating and monitoring the African preparation process. The Commission has accomplished the following:

i.   In collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and ITU in Addis Ababa, the Commission adopted a format for the Conference of Accra and worked closely with the African Telecommunication Union on sensitization of Member States;
ii. Participated in thematic sessions in Accra, in the Ministerial Meeting and in the Regional Conference;
iii. Financially contributed to the organization of the conference of Accra
iv. Participated in the Pan-Arab Meeting in Cairo, and in the African Ministerial Committee meeting.

3.3   The Digital Solidarity Fund

In February 2003, during the preparatory process of the first phase of WSIS, His Excellency Mr. A Wade, President of Republic of Senegal, has proposed on behalf of Africa, to create a Global Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF). The fund would support a new financial mechanism for development and mobilisation of international networks for local authorities.

The DSF was launched officially in Geneva on 14th March 2005 in the presence of His Excellency Mr Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Mr. A Wade, President of Republic of Senegal and the chairman of NEPAD

Prof. W. Nkuhlu. The fund has received contributions from its 17 founding members in 2005. The fund Executive Committee and its Secretariat will prepare the move from political support to legal agreement, by calling an international conference in 2006 in Geneva. The objective of the conference will be the adoption of an International Convention on a global DSF. Bamako Bureau and the African community are still working on developing the best systems for resource mobilization, financing mechanisms, intervention policy, monitoring, evaluation of activities, and so on.

3.4. Issues to be discussed in Tunis

The Summit of Tunis should be the phase for resolutions and planning concrete actions. The essential issues are:

    i. The implementation of the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action of Geneva 2003;
    ii. Discussion of decisions on the report of the WGIG
    iii. Discussion of decisions on the report of the working group on the mechanisms of financing the development of ICT.

The Tunis Summit will therefore focus more on political issues.

3.5. Observations:

a.   African Positions on points in the agenda of the Summit should continue being enriched by different meetings;

b.   In accordance with the practice of the Commission of the African Union, the adoption of the Plan of Action did not involve enough Ministers.. Only a few Ministers participated in the Meeting of the African Ministerial Committee in Cairo, where the Action Plan was adopted.

c.   Concrete steps towards the implementation and monitoring of the Plan of Action have not yet been defined. They are yet to be adopted at either at worldwide level or at African level. In effect, this question of bet opens the Plan of Action, provokes a lot of debate on several There has also not been allocation of responsibility for implementation and monitoring, considering the multiplicity of actors, representatives at the regional and international level of the implementation of Plan, and so on.

3.6. Recommendations:

According to the above discussion the following recommendations are proposed to the Summit:

    1. Provide the appropriate conditions for consultations and coordination to the African group to participate more actively in the preparatory process and better translate African interests in the guidelines and outcome of Tunis summit;

2. Ensure the massive participation of Heads of States and Governments in Tunis Summit;

3. Ensure the existence of appropriate follow up mechanism and monitoring strategy for the Action Plan;

4. Organize a meeting of Ministers in charge of telecommunications and ICT to examine and adopt the Action Plan and its implementation mechanism;

5. Invite all Member States, local authorities, international, and regional organizations to support and contribute to the Digital Solidarity Fund.

2005

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African Union

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