

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

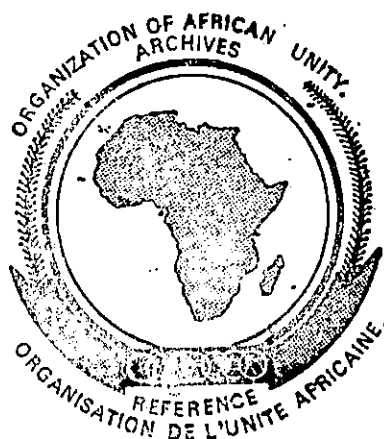
NINTH ORDINARY SESSION

KINSHASA - SEPTEMBER, 1967.

CM/168 (Part 12)

Telecommunications - An African Network

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This document was originally prepared for the consideration of the third session of the Economic & Social Commission, scheduled to meet in May 1967. The meeting having been postponed, the same document is now submitted to the Council of Ministers.

Joint Session
Addis Ababa, May 8 - 13, 1967.

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Telecommunications - An African Network

I. Introduction:

1. The transport and Communications Commission of the OAU, meeting in Cairo (U.A.R.) from 24th October to 5th November 1964, passed three resolutions on the problems of telecommunications in the continent and the need for an African Network.
2. The first resolution (TRC/Res.7) recommended "that communications between any two-African Member-States be established either directly or via another African Member State wherever this is possible, and that all traffic inside Africa be routed through Member States". It further recommended that the Dakar and Rome Plans be realized as rapidly as possible.
3. The second resolution (TRC/Res.9) was on the principles underlying telephone and telegraph tariffs between Member States, and recommended the modification of existing rates, with a view to improve inter-African telecommunications facilities and to study, the possibility of establishing preferential rates on telegraph and telephone services among Member States.
4. The third Resolution (TRC/Res.8) was concerned with the utilization of space satellites and the provision of a co-axial submarine cable linking West and Central African States; and recommended studies on the economic and technical aspects of providing these facilities and their relevance to the establishment of an all African Telecommunications Network.
5. The resolutions, thus, covered all aspects of telecommunications services: a routing plan drawing up a system whereby all connections will be through African Stations in so far as this is possible; a review and modification of existing tariff systems with a view to facilitate and bring about more intra-African contact, and as well as the possible utilization of satellite earth stations and to capitalize on this technological innovation for the creation of a more rational and extensive African telecommunications system.

II. Problems in the field of Telecommunications:

6. Africa inherited, and is sustaining, a telecommunications system which is both outmoded and irrational. Three aspects of the system and the problems therein will be briefly surveyed here.
7. Firstly, very much like the Road and Rail systems installed during the colonial era, African telecommunication systems are conditioned by what has been termed the "colonial pact", which entailed a link with the hinterland from the ports and from the ports to colonial capitals or stations. The essence of the whole system lay in the transportation of raw materials from the hinterland to the ports and then on to the respective European destinations. Thus there were no inter-hinterland links nor were there, on the whole, any inter-port links. Thus African Ports of two neighbouring States (sometimes barely more than 100 kms), and up-country towns, were never linked even if the colonial power administered both States.
8. The problem besetting African Telecommunications is basically similar to that outlined in the preceding paragraph. Telecommunications services were essentially meant to facilitate contact between the Metropolitan States and the colonial territories.
9. Secondly, the costs of telephone and telegraph links between African Countries are prohibitive and are a decided disincentive to inter-African contact.
10. Thirdly, the equipment and telecommunications machinery in use in Africa are, on the whole, outmoded.
11. Thus Africa is faced with a situation whereby existing telecommunication machinery and equipment are not only obsolete but were also installed to cater for needs that are no longer relevant to African conditions.

III. OAU/ECA meeting on Telecommunications

12. In March 1966, a joint meeting of OAU and ECA on telecommunications in Africa was held in Addis Ababa and attended by 34 Member and associate Member States. The meeting discussed the different aspects of telecommunications in Africa with particular emphasis on training of junior as well as senior telecommunication personnel, the establishment of effective multinational telecommunications centres in Africa, the role of technical

assistance in the improvement of telecommunication in Africa, and financing of national and sub-regional telecommunications networks.

13. Among the most important decisions of the meeting was the one inviting the ITU Africa Committee to prepare a plan for the Pan-African network at a meeting to be held before the end of 1966.

IV. Africa Plan-Committees and Their Effectiveness

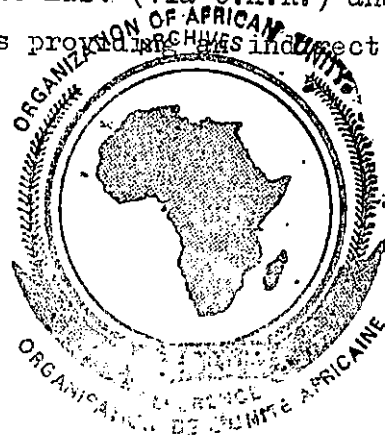
14. The Africa Plan Committee had its first meeting in Dakar, Senegal in 1962; the Second Session took place in Addis Ababa from the 23 January to 8th February, 1967. The Plan Committee is one of the regional committees concerned with the development of telecommunications in the various parts of ^{the} world, and comes under the responsibility of the CCITT and CCIR, which in turn are permanent organs of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).

15. The Africa Plan Committee highlighted the problems besetting the development of Telecommunications in Africa first in Rome and secondly in Dakar. The Third meeting (second in a purely African context) held in Addis Ababa, however, proved to be, by far, the most successful of the meetings with regard to the assessment of the problems being faced in this field and the charting of possible solutions.

16. Partly because of the successes achieved in this last session, and partly because of the fact that the terms of reference of the Committee were very much in line with the resolutions cited at the beginning of this text, it has been deemed useful to outline the technical success of the Committee with regard to the problem of routing, tariffs, and the possible utilization of the technological successes of space satellites.

17. With regard to routing of inter-African traffic within Africa, the Plan Committee divided Africa into three zones (North, East and West). Every two countries in each zone worked out a routing plan; then the whole zone was inter-connected.

18. Having successfully negotiated this the Committee proceeded to connect the three zones: North to East (via U.A.R.) and North to West (via Mauritania). The North thus provided an indirect link between East and West.



19. The question of the West African Submarine cable was discussed within the context of an overall routing plan inter-connecting Africa. In this connection the Committee was of the opinion that since the initiation of this project, new techniques have been developed for Telecommunication Services. In the light of these innovations in telecommunications technology (space satellites) and the fact that some African countries have plans for the establishment of Earth-Stations for the utilization of both Indian and Atlantic Ocean Satellites, and since plans for radio links are being put into effect between neighbouring countries in the West African Zone; the Plan Committee recommended the abandoning of the Submarine cable system.

20. The Committee was, further, of the opinion that a radio relay system along the coast of West Africa is a feasible and cheaper alternative to the submarine cable project.

21. As far as rates and tariffs of inter-African traffic was concerned, the Committee recognized that the principles underlying the present system need be revised with a view to facilitating inter-African contact.

22. Unfortunately, however, a comprehensive rating system called for numerous calculations and references to regulations governing international tariffing as a whole. Thus, the study of the problem and the drawing up of an economic but cheap rating structure that would facilitate more and speedy inter-African contact, was entrusted to a technical committee of the ITU (the CCITT: International Consultative Committee on Telegraphs and Telephones).

IV. Recommendations:

23. As a rational and economic telecommunications network would provide a framework for inter-African co-operation, the speedy implementation of the "Routing plan" drawn up by the Plan Committee for Africa is essential, and need be given top priority.

24. The African Governments who plan to install earth-stations for the utilization of space satellites, be urged to envisage within their national projects a wider utilization of their installations, and to discuss such plans with neighbouring sister States.

25. As existing rates and tariffs are an obstacle to more inter-African contact, the CCITT should be urged to speed up its preparation of a more meaningful and cheaper rate structure. Without the successful completion of this, the admirable "routing plan" drawn up by the Committee will fall victim to existing excessive rates and would not fulfill its objective of wider and speedier inter-African contact.
26. The Plan Committee ought to be lauded for its excellent efforts, and support in the political organs of the OAU, as well as within national administrations assured.
27. The cooperation between the OAU, the ECA, and the ITU, through which it was possible for the plan committee to achieve its most important task of routing of inter-African traffic within Africa, should be further strengthened. The ITU, as well as other international bodies tackling different aspects of human endeavour in Africa should, not only coordinate their activities with those of the Commissions of the OAU, but also have to seek the approval of the OAU's political bodies of those activities before their execution.
28. Training of telecommunication personnel should take place in centres to be established in the continent. Training in foreign countries attaining much higher level of technology tends to give little consideration, if any at all, to local conditions.
29. African countries should try to standardize their telecommunication equipments. This would facilitate the task of the technicians and harmonize services.



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