

## **B1. BRIDGING THE INFRASTRUCTURE GAP**

### **(ii) Bridging the Digital Divide: Investing in Information and Communication Technologies**

104. Information and communication technologies (ICTs), driven by the convergence of computers, telecommunications and traditional media, are crucial for the knowledge-based economy of the future. Rapid advances in technology and the diminishing cost of acquiring the new ICT tools have opened new windows of opportunity for African countries to accelerate their economic growth and development. The goals of achieving a Common Market and an African Union can benefit immensely from the revolution in information technology. In addition to fostering intra-regional trade, the use of ICTs could also accelerate Africa's integration into the global economy.

105. Intensive use of ICTs can bring unprecedented comparative advantages to the continent:

- It can give impetus to the democratisation process and good governance;
- It can facilitate the integration of Africa into the new information society, using its cultural diversity as a leverage;
- ICTs can be helpful tools in a wide range of applications, such as remote sensing and environmental, agricultural and infrastructural planning;
- The existing complementarities can be better utilised to provide training that would allow for the production of a critical mass of professionals in the use of ICTs;
- In the research sector, we can establish African programmes as well as technological exchange programmes capable of meeting the continent's specific needs, with particular regard to the fight against illiteracy;
- ICTs can be used to identify and exploit opportunities for trade, investment and finance;
- They can be used to establish regional distance learning and health education programmes to improve the situation in the health and education sectors;
- In conflict management and the control of pandemic diseases, ICTs will help towards the organisation of an efficient early warning mechanism by providing the tools for constant

monitoring of tension spots.

106. In Africa, poor ICT infrastructure, combined with weak policy and regulatory frameworks and limited human resources, has resulted in inadequate access to affordable telephones, broadcasting, computers and the Internet. African teledensity remains below one line per 100 people. Service costs are also high: the connection cost in Africa averages 20 per cent of GDP per capita, compared with the world average of 9 per cent, and 1 per cent for high-income countries. Africa has been unable to capitalise on ICT as a tool in enhancing livelihoods and creating new business opportunities, and cross-border linkages within the continent and with global markets have been constrained. Although many countries in Africa have started ICT policy reforms, service penetration, quality and tariffs have not yet improved.

107. **Objectives**

- To double teledensity to two lines per 100 people by 2005, with an adequate level of access for households;
- To lower the cost and improve reliability of service;
- To achieve e-readiness for all countries in Africa;
- To develop and produce a pool of ICT-proficient youth and students from which Africa can draw trainee ICT engineers, programmers and software developers;
- To develop local-content software, based especially on Africa's cultural legacy.

108. **Actions**

- Work with regional agencies such as the African Telecommunications Union and Africa Connection to design model policy and legislation for telecommunications reform, and protocols and templates for e-readiness assessments;
- Work with the regional agencies to build regulatory capacity;
- Establish a network of training and research institutions to build high-level manpower;
- Promote and accelerate existing projects to connect schools and youth centres;

- Work with development finance institutions in Africa, multilateral initiatives (G-8 DotForce, UN Task Force) and bilateral donors to establish financial mechanisms for mitigating and reducing sector risks.