

European-African Pact on ICT for Development: Creating synergies by supporting the emerging knowledge societies in developing countries through the European IST Programme

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Developing countries need the deployment of ICTs for accelerated and sustainable development.

A quantum leap in development is required for developing countries to achieve the „Millennium Development Goals – MDGs“. It is widely accepted today that a decisive accelerator for development processes are information and communication technologies – ICTs. In order to achieve, for example, the educational MDG - universal primary education by 2015 - UNESCO estimated that additional fifteen million teachers and hundred of thousands of teacher educators will be needed. This quantum leap in education can only be achieved through the deployment of ICTs.

This is what places ICTs so high on the agendas of many governments in developing countries. ICTs are seen as the key solution that will allow them to meet the needs in rural and under-served areas and bring services to widely distributed citizens rapidly and cost efficiently, be it in health, education or public services.

Europe and the European R&D programmes need a strategic partnership with developing countries.

In Europe the building of Information Societies is at the core of European Commission R&D programmes. The topics addressed by the European programmes such as eLearning, eWork, eGovernance and eHealth are highly relevant for developing countries. In 2005 the European Commission formulated a new strategy for Africa that relates to the MDGs and suggests a new framework for development policy in order to accelerate Africa's growth.

In this new framework the digital divide is addressed through a proposed „EU-Africa Partnership for Infrastructure“ and a number of „access to knowledge and transfer of know-how“ initiatives. So far the framework offers an important access driven strategy. The new framework should however complement “access” with an explicit ICT based enabling strategy. Such a widening of the perspective can be achieved through building a bridge between the European „Information Society Technologies – IST“ programme and the many and ambitious „ICT for Development“ projects currently being deployed in numerous developing countries.

In a European strategic partnership with Africa the IST programme should therefore play an active role. Creating the framework for an inclusive research and development approach between Europe and developing countries is not only very important from a European perspective, it will also play an important role for the dynamic leapfrogging phenomena one can observe today in many developing countries.

Africa and Europe will both gain from joint applied R&D.

For the European Information Society Technologies community the forging of close links with counterparts in developing countries is a highly relevant mission today. From a European perspective collaboration for the advancement of information society technologies with relevant institutions in the South will

- allow to taking-up of important requirements and needs of emerging markets;
- make R&D results more relevant and widen their up-take potential;
- open the potential of their application to new usergroups, communities, markets and thus valorise outcomes and results;
- build new valuable partnerships and
- have a significant impact on improving the lives of millions of underprivileged people.

For the R&D communities in developing countries partnerships with European projects will

- strengthen local and regional R&D capacities;
- enhance national „ICT for Development“ projects and widen and deepen the role of local ICT stakeholders in the implementation of multi-lateral ICT programmes;
- facilitate the entrance into an international research process and voice demands and concepts from a developing perspective;
- allow many higher education institutions to link up with R&D for the first time;
- have a significant impact on the quality of academic education;
- and create new business opportunities with partners in European countries.

Conclusion and recommendations

Some European R&D projects have started to include African partners. A specific inclusive approach of European IST projects, directed toward developing countries, is however just in its start-up phase.

The undersigning persons – all engaged in European R&D projects of the Information Society Technology Programme and in „ICT for Development“ programmes in Africa and Asia - pledge to support the inclusion of counterparts in developing countries in forthcoming IST programmes with the following steps:

- European IST research programmes should take the aspect of inclusion related to developing countries into account.
- The new calls for proposals should encourage institutions to initiate partnerships with developing countries.
- Innovative partnership projects should be launched in the fields of eLearning, eWork, eGovernance and eHealth, thus creating an immediate impact on the many “ICT for Development” projects in developing countries and accelerating cost-efficient development processes.
- The Information Society Technologies Programme should - as a first step - set up an „Information Society Technologies for Development“ Forum, similar to the already planned “Euro-African Business Forum“. The aim: to function as an Observatory for identifying stakeholders and to map out existing initiatives and their potential for partnership in forthcoming EU R&D programmes.

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