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Evaluation framework used to guide ICT development

Using ICTs for promotion of good governance involves more than simply open access to government information on the Internet. It involves an interaction between government, the NGO, community and private sectors, with fora for open debate and an exchange of information and views.

Much is written and discussed about policy, standards and regulation in infrastructure and this may lead governments to see themselves only as policy makers, regulators, and suppliers of infrastructure for the information highway. However there is a different and equally important role for them to play, which is in creating openness in the process of governance. The information highway creates an opportunity and indeed an obligation on governments to share their information using ICTs.

This paper does not address government's obligations in relation to the creation of infrastructure. It looks at the government's obligations in distributing its information and allowing its people access to government documentation and activities and the role of NGOs in the governance process.

2 METHODOLOGY

The time constraints imposed on this study have largely informed the method of gathering information, and the extent and range of answers obtained.

E-mail messages were sent to all the known sysops of NGO and some commercial electronic networks in Africa. Faxes and e-mails were sent to human rights organisations throughout Africa. All 600 SANGONeT members were sent e-mail. Known contacts / experts / donors were sent e-mails and these led to further contacts being made and pursued. Approximately 300 e-mails were thus sent and received. Where necessary phone calls were made to obtain information or follow leads. I networked on the Internet, through Web sites and list servers. Within the time constraints I found that people using e-mail to be much more oriented towards quick interaction and response.

A detailed questionnaire was sent out to people once I had established that they may be involved in a project of interest. Questionnaires returned were followed up with specific inquiries for more details. Where possible, project proposals were sought. No evaluations had been undertaken or were sought.

Outlines, objectives and descriptions can thus be given for the projects but many are in their early stages, and are still developing the concept of the use of ICTs for governance. Some of the questions posed the terms of reference could not be answered due to the fledgling nature of many projects, for example what tools are used for the decentralisation of political and administrative responsibility. It has

therefore been difficult to draw conclusions or even inferences, and the suggestions made in this study are by necessity tentative.

3 OVERVIEW OF GOVERNMENT-ORIENTED SITES

According to Mayuri Odedra, 90% of the information about Africa is located on databases outside of Africa. This is certainly the case for information on the Internet, where most sites are to be found is developed and located elsewhere, particularly in the USA. However, as full Internet service provision spreads through Africa, it is possible that more sites will come to be located in African countries.

An overview of sites on the Web reveals that there are very few African governments on-line in any form. From Angola to Zimbabwe one can find few sites which have been put up by government departments. Respondents to our questionnaires usually reported that no government departments were on-line, or that on the Department of Tourism had a site (for example Cote d'Ivoire). In the Cameroon the Ministry of Health is a member of Healthnet, while individual civil servants subscribe to RIO, CamFido, Healthnet or Refer. Some members of parliament were on-line (for example 5 in Ethiopia; in Zambia, the Vice-President, two Ministers (privately) and several other members of parliament).

While some sites call themselves the 'official' site of the country they are usually run by private individuals or institutions which wish to put up information about their country. 'The Official Mozambique Home Page' (<http://www.uem.mz/mozambique/index.html>.) suggest that you can 'locate a particular government department; find the best spot for a holiday or see what's on in Maputo'. While inclusion of commercial and trade-oriented information is to encourage investors and tourists to the country, the listing of names of ministers and government contacts is probably more oriented towards this audience than to citizens of the country calling for information about government activity.

A number of African countries' embassies (usually in Washington) have their own Web sites. Examples are the Gambia (<http://www.gambia.com/govt/kogongah.html>), and Angola (<http://www.angola.org/angola/>).

A Swaziland site, run by UUNET Internet Africa, provides government information, which is obtained through ad hoc communication channels. Amongst business and other information is the new Prime Minister's policy speech to parliament 16 August 1996 (provided in on the Internet just as the Prime Minister finished delivering it, and the Fifth draft of the Income Tax Bill. While this is not an official site, Internet Africa Swaziland has made a proposal to the government for connectivity and more structured release of information via the Internet. Similar approaches are known to have been made to government in Uganda and Benin by commercial ISPs.

List servers and newsgroups or conferences are a means of holding on-line discussions. There are many of these relating to discussion about Africa, its countries, issues, people and politics. They are usually run by academics or NGOs. They enable civil society participation in governance and engender democratisation through open debate and expression of ideas. Most African countries are the subject of one or other list server or newsgroup. The Association of Progressive Communications (APC) has its own set of conferences which enable discussion to take place and for documents to be disseminated. In the developing world the APC conferences are a major source of documents and exchange of views.

4 TYPES OF ACTIVITIES SURVEYED

4.1 DELIVERY OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

In the move toward a democratic, transparent and accountable governance process, citizens want, and should be entitled, to know what their governments are doing and what information is available. However, the state of government activity using ICTs in sub-Saharan Africa is not highly developed at this stage. Of the four projects described in this section, two emanate from government quarters, while the other two are non-governmental.

With the exception of South Africa, government provision of information in sub-Saharan Africa through the Internet or other electronic means is extremely limited at present.

The range of activities which has been looked at is:

- . an official Web site for the government;
- . Web sites of ministries or departments;
- . Web sites of governmental bodies;
- . e-mail reply addresses on Web sites;
- . members of parliamentarian on-line;
- . list servers for disseminating government information

Some of the reasons why a government agency might choose to distribute their information using ICTs include:

- . Lower cost than print distribution
- . Broad distribution at relatively little cost
- . Speedy distribution at low cost
- . More information can be made accessible at lower cost
- . Government is therefore able to provide more information to the public than it would have before.

- . Different but important type of information can be distributed e.g. staff members of departments, contact details etc.
- . Access is provided to information in remote/rural areas
- . People can respond and / or put their own views across
- . Putting into effect commitment to transparency, accountability, democratisation

In representations made by the Black Sash, a human rights and advocacy NGO in South Africa, to the Task Group on Government Communications (COMTASK), They make certain valuable points about the communication of government information based on their years of experience in working with communities' legal issues. They point out that:

- . information must be in plain language
- . forms should be in one language (not multiple languages on one form) and in plain language
- . people should have the right to information and the right to administrative justice, such as being given reasons for the decisions of administrative bodies
- . new laws and regulations should be communicated to people
- . when new and essential information is not newsworthy, the media cannot be relied upon to disseminate it and other strategies must be found by the departments concerned
- . appropriate strategies for disseminating information must be found, such as community radio, pamphlets, posters etc, rather than glossy booklets
- . information must be distributed as such, and not be used as propaganda for political parties.

One should take cognisance of these points when considering using ICTs for communicating government information. At present the available government information does not satisfy most of these requirements. If government information is to be communicated more broadly to communities, these are basic standards which would help the information to reach the right people and to be of any value to them in enforcing their basic human rights.

South African Government sites: Most of the government sites to be found in Africa are in South Africa. One ministry, 3 departments and 18 government bodies have set up Web sites. The ANC party site functions as a 'government' site as it publishes a lot of development information. It also uses list servers to send out information. There is therefore a substantial amount of activity in using ICTs to distribute information, although there are few departments on-line. Some of the sites are done by the South African Communications Services (SACS) while others are independently mounted. SACS has begun to take on publishing of Government documents with greater alacrity than earlier in 1996. At present the future of the SACS is the subject of a Task Group (COMTASK) and no assumptions can be made

until they have made their final report.

The African National Congress site is publicly considered the 'government's site' - it has a section on the Government of National Unity where it distributes government documents and information about the government. It publishes policy documents and selected draft and final legislation). The ANC runs two list servers through which it distributes documents, policy and news digests (these are summaries of other news services and do not reflect the ANC viewpoint).

There is interest in South Africa in the distribution of government information. There is demand from civil society and conscientisation within the government. Numerous departments wish to put up sites, but one cannot be sure of the different motivations. It would be worthwhile addressing this from a freedom of information point of view, particularly as a Freedom of Information Bill has been drafted and discussed in various fora, and may go to Parliament within months. Unfortunately there is no concerted effort being made to provide legislation, regulations, tenders etc freely on the Internet and this should be addressed. Central government does not appear to be looking at public information centres where it provides information about services and projects, as is being done in Gauteng and the North-West Province. The efforts made by these two governments may be interesting models for access to local development information. While the Gauteng government is still planning its public information centre, the North-West Province has a 'One Stop Shop' kiosk concept, where development information, including statistics, are available to the public.

The Eritrea Information Systems Agency (EISA) aims to improve the application of information and communication technologies in Eritrea by providing government with networks which can ultimately be linked to the Internet.

The EISA project is a government information and telematics policy making and implementation agency directed by the President's office. EISA completed a master plan to improve the application of information and communication technologies in Eritrea. The master plan also aims to build a Wide Area Network among various government institutions. The ultimate goal of the master plan is to develop a local network that can be linked to a full TCP/IP connection.

Although not very much information is known about this project, which is largely to do with building infrastructure, there is an awareness of sharing information through the Internet, which could be explored further. It is also initiated at a high level in government and is charged with policy making.

The Electronic Online Databases & Internet Access (ELODIA) in Benin aims to widen the use of ICT to other West African countries such as Burkina-Faso, Ghana, Togo,

Niger and Nigeria. Beyond simple "Internet consumption" Elodia proposes "Internet production" by the means of interactive online spaces (such as online forums, newsgroups, databases, secured websites) created for and by organisations, institutions, and others. The topics of interests one can find through the ELODIA network include politics, economy, civil society, religion and arts and culture.

ELODIA is currently helping the Benin Government, which wants to use ICTs as a development tool, to install an Internet connection for some of the Ministries and to put up a web site. We do not have very much information about ELODIA, but it is possible that it is a small business. Their intentions go beyond simple Internet access to providing government information from Ministries and they could be show potential.

SANGONeT is an NGO Internet Service Provider, providing government information, particularly policy documents and a forum for debate amongst its members (see Case Study). It has tried to get government departments to set up Web sites and has set up the sites for the Department of Land Affairs and for a statutory body, the Independent Broadcasting Authority. It also provides space for NGOs to put up their own Web sites.. With its strong base in the technology, it is able to provide the necessary services to enable debate to take place electronically, and for civil society to access government information timeously. It has been able to provide the means for its members to lobby, research and campaign using the Internet.

The SANGONeT initiative is important in creating a forum on the Internet where the NGO sector can be encouraged to participate in debate and publishing information on governance issues. It develops capacity through its training. Its advocacy work enables it to promote the Internet as a meaningful source of governance information and debate in the NGO sector. As such it provides a lobby for open access to government information in South Africa.

ZAMNET is having preliminary discussions with State House regarding their own Web page, and planning a page for the forthcoming general election. At present there is not indication that this will be supported or run by the government. ZAMNET is the only commercial ISP in Zambia and the only host of Web sites located in Zambia. The site includes one government department and one governmental body, the three State-owned newspapers and the one independent newspaper, The Post.

4.2 NETWORKING AND SHARING INFORMATION

ICTs are an ideal mechanism for enabling networking, as at least e-mail is available in many countries. The projects described here have networking and sharing of information inherent in their activities.

CODESRIA's Democratic Governance Institute have been holding annual 3 month seminars since 1992. It brings together researchers from all over Africa to share

experiences and research, promote an African democratic intellectual culture and encourage critical participation in discussions on democratisation in Africa. Selected researchers gather at CODESRIA every year, where they are provided with a comprehensive bibliography on the theme of the year. They also have access to a number of documentation centres around Dakar.

CODESRIA uses e-mail for sending and receiving files from them. E-mail allows for easy, fast and cheap messaging and wider dissemination of information. The Internet allows for many possibilities for accessing a considerable number of sources. CODESRIA has found that this has created an awareness of the great importance and the role of information technologies in identifying, collecting, processing and disseminating information.

(ARCC) The African Regional Centre for Computing is a non profit non Governmental Organisation (NGO) whose main objective is to promote the development and usage for computing and communication technologies in Africa with an initial focus on Kenya. It promotes governance through a list server - JUSTNET - which is a legal/human rights discussion forum on the administration of justice. It also runs the list server KenyNews/Kenya-net for disseminating Kenyan and East African news including discussion of Kenya's issues by Kenyans and Kenyanists. ARCC activities include high-level training, consultancy, research and development, information systems design and development, and publication of magazines, newsletters and network operation and support. ARCC combines technical expertise with the promotion of democratisation in Kenya. ARCC has proposed the African Democracy Network (ADN) project, to provide technical e-mail link-ups for 24 countries participating in the network to share information and experiences on democratisation.

The ADN project focuses directly on the use of ICTs in promoting democracy including participants from government, the private and NGOs. It focuses on the exchange of information for the promotion of democracy. There may be some overlap however with the AFRONET project (see Human Rights section). It is committed to local technical capacity building and using African technicians, linking up with the African Academic Research Networking Foundation. The proposal is a technical one, with no detail on the information to be shared. This would have to be paid attention if the project were to succeed in its aims.

The SADC Electronic Network is different in that it aims to connect its own sectoral offices, units and its Secretariat in Gaborone. In a networking-type organisation with dispersed offices this could be seen as essential. It will assist management reform and integration within the region and to provide SADC with appropriate and necessary information, using modern technology such as network infrastructure

and databases.

This project is important for economic development in the SADC countries. It will share scarce resources in relation to economic activity in the region for economic growth and integration and develop technical capacity. The process of policy making for the project will be important in conscientising participants from the member countries as to the value of ICTs and they may bring this back to their own countries. There is policy making involved in the development of standards for data sharing, including holding of seminars for formulating and negotiating policies, translating them into legislation etc. One of the components of the project is

technical training of professionals in the region. It further aims to ensure the use of the information through marketing and distribution. This project could be of great benefit to the region and enhance efforts towards the use of ICTs for good governance.

The Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) in Harare aims to establish a data centre for electronic storage and access to information about the SADC region and the 12 member states. It will liaise closely with SADC Secretariat and Sector on Culture and Information, through the Information 21 partnership and with UNECA's PADIS. The data centre will contain periodical indexes, statistics, contact information such as trade and investment opportunities, socio-economic statistics, political, environmental and gender information, peace management, security and conflict resolution, ESAP monitor, regional consultants register, media institutions and outlets and other information relevant to the SADC region.

The SARDC information service is well-developed and has been running for a number of years. It would be very worthwhile to share the information which they collect through the use of ICTs. The SADC electronic networking initiative would also benefit from the inflow of an established collection of information on the region. This project is therefore complementary to the SADC initiative for sharing information regionally.

4.3 LEGAL INFORMATION

One of the areas where governance information is located is in the law. Four projects in with a legal information focus were found to use ICTs:

Zambian Legal Information Institute (ZamLII) was established by the Law School of the University of Zambia in 1996 in partnership with Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute. It has a Web site based in Zambia, distributing legal

information. Its aim is to improve access to judgements, statutes and other legal materials for the Zambia both within Zambia and elsewhere, and to connect lawyers, judges, academics, and others within Zambia with the growing collection of legal information available around the globe via the Internet. The site carries court decisions, selected legislation, the Zambia Law Journal. Insufficient information was available to know if the Courts and Legislature are playing an active role in the development of the site.

Based on the Cornell LII model, this project could therefore be developed into a very worthwhile site. However it could be worthwhile to link up with other Universities doing similar work with legal sites, such as the University of the Witwatersrand.

The Law School at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa has a Web site where it distribute the decisions of the South African Constitutional Court and related legal materials. This is done as a free public service in order to provide the information as widely and as quickly as possible after decisions are handed down: nearly all decisions have been published on the same day as they were handed down. The site is located in South Africa but has been accessed from all over the world. There is also a notification list server and a discussion list server.

The project was started in March 1995, in time for the first decisions handed down by the Court - it is envisaged that this would be an ongoing service, and that the service will be expanded as funds and resources allow. They consider that the site is important in promoting constitutional development and building of a human rights culture in South Africa.

It is important for courts to make their decisions and other papers accessible to litigants and the general public, particularly in the new development of a Constitutional jurisprudence in South Africa. This site is however, an independent site, and the question remains whether the Constitutional Court should not take greater responsibility for publishing its materials on the Internet.

The Legal Resource Centre (LRC) is using ICTs for networking within the organisation, sharing information through Intranet and linking up to the Internet and external databases. The LRC is a South African public interest law firm which aims to work for social justice, using legal tools to achieve this. At the beginning of 1995, the LRC started to implement an ICT project to assist its lawyers in better and more efficiently serving clients and to allow the organisation to run more cost effectively. All the LRC lawyers throughout the country are to be linked with a WAN connection. They will have links to electronic legal and international information such as the Lexis Nexis databases. The network that is to be created will integrate an internal precedent bank to assist in preparation of cases and some management tools such as accounting and costing programs and a client database.

In complement to this internal use of ICT, the project also aims to make the LRC's

databases and human right publications available on the Internet as a benefit to lawyers and activists around the world. A catalogue of the LRC's library collection will be published on the Internet and LRC publications made accessible through a web site. The LRC hopes that the ICTs project will allow its Gender Programme to get exposure and enable the promotion of gender issues such as the legal and constitutional rights of women.

In spite of the LRC being an established and well-resourced NGO there are a number of obstacles in implementing the project. These include: the need for more adequate staffing to drive the project and continue its implementation and development; a shortage of computer literacy skills in the organisation and the need for extensive and ongoing training; and the need for more funding for training and expansion of the infrastructure.

While much of the LRC's information sharing is internal to the organisation, it has plans to publish information on the Web. Insofar as the LRC has set legal precedent over the years of apartheid struggle in South Africa, they may lead in sharing of public interest and constitutional rights information. Their information will be of great interest in South Africa and internationally.

Legi-link operates as a small business which provides information links between Parliament and civil society interest groups (see Case Study). It has filled the gap in the information emanating from the National Parliamentary process which is needed by people wanting to intervene in the process. Legi-link, took the approach of creating structured databases for its information. It is now becoming ready to share this information by means of a Web site. To date it has used fax, e-mail, courier services and personal communication.

Through its provision of information services Legi-link has enabled a number of organisations to understand and relate to Parliament effectively. In order to spread these skills more widely in contributing to the democratic process, it would be beneficial to take a more training-oriented approach.

One area that is lacking in the legal field is legal debate using ICTs. Although the University of the Witwatersrand Law School has set up a discussion list server, it finds that it is scarcely used. This may be due to a number of factors: many lawyers do not have computers on their desks; they may be uncertain about how much they can discuss on the Internet; they may have other places where such discussions take place. However the effect for civil society is that the law remains at a distance from them and an area in which they cannot intervene.

4.4 SERVICES TO PARLIAMENT / PUBLIC SECTOR

The six projects in this section deal with different aspects of the use of ICTs in Parliament and the public sector. The SADC project deals with research and use of

technology for information delivery; GOVERNET networks public sector management reform professionals, and trains them in the use of ICTs; Diplomacy@Information. Technology focuses on trainee diplomats for the spreading of ICT skills and policy making. While the CSIR and the NDI projects provide training and ICT skills to Parliamentarians and staff, the former focuses on a very small group and the latter on bringing ICTs and electronic information to the whole of the Namibian Parliament. Finally FILM-UP provides information sharing hardware, networking, software and training to the Ministry of Legal Affairs in Zambia.

The SADC Regional Information and Research Network for Members of Parliament aims to increase the flow of information and improve research capacity among members of parliament in Southern African countries. It is not directly working on ICTs, but it will be holding a conference for parliamentary librarians, researchers and information specialists to consider information delivery systems and new technologies.

Although his project is not directly based in the use of ICTs, it will bring together people working with information and needing information. This can provide impetus for electronic sharing and researching.

Efficiency, lack of duplication, and management reform are necessary elements to developing an accountable and well-functioning public sector. GOVERNET, now based in Malta is a project which networks regionally, bringing together public sector administrative and management reform professionals in Eastern and Southern Africa (see Case Study). Their focus is on public sector management reform. The project includes training in ICTs and how to exchange and use information between and within organisations. While no formal evaluation is available, the project co-ordinator, Gerry Grant has offered numerous useful insights into the failure of the network to become more functional after 2 years of operation.

The Diplomacy@Information. Technology project, also based in Malta and implemented by the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, aims to develop a network between diplomatic and international relations institutes in Malta, Geneva, Yaounde, Nairobi, Trinidad and Tobago. Through this network, the project will promote the use of ICTs in diplomatic activities and international relations. The project has ICTs at its core, aiming not only to use ICTS for networking and information sharing, but also to influence policy in the use of information technology for diplomacy. In the second phase of the project, the regional centres will provide computer networks to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in their countries.

This project has potential in the areas of policy-making, technical training and capacity-building, sharing information on governance issues (e.g. by structured databases). It also has benefits for the Ministries of participating countries.

The Namibian Parliament does not have many computers available and many parliamentarians and staff have not experienced the benefits of computers in their work. The National Democracy Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is attempting to assist in the development of the Namibian Parliament by working with the two chambers of the Namibian Parliament: the National Assembly and the National Council. The objective of their programme is to assist Namibian participants in creating institutions in the legislative branch that are more accountable, transparent and that promote a deliberative process of legislative formation. They also work with a large number of local NGOs, including the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) and the Namibian Non-Governmental Forum (NANGOF).

The aim of legislative reform requires research and research facilities and they plan to reopen the Parliamentary Library and to provide CD-ROM products and the Internet. Together with the NDI's broad-based staff training programme, this will assist in the development of a parliamentary staff that is able to carry out legislative research to assist MPs in the formulation of legislation.

They are currently in the process of building a local area network (LAN) as well as wiring their building with a fibre optic backbone for later expansion of the network to include, if desired, the entire staff of the two houses of Parliament.

This project could empower the Namibian Legislature with ICT skills and usage in order to do research for the legislative process, starting with training in basic computer skills. It could also enable the Namibian Parliament Library to reopen and to share its resources electronically. It works with NGOs and government ministries and departments in the sharing of information. This project has many facets and may be an interesting model in developing necessary capacity and information sharing in the Legislature.

A Parliamentary project on a different scale, being implemented in two Portfolio Committees of the South African National Assembly is the CSIR: Parliament Information Centre. It supplies Internet access, training and support to two and possibly three parliamentarians.

At the outset it was necessary to provide basic computer and mouse training to the participants. They were then given e-mail training including management of messages and encouraged to find out the e-mail addresses of people with whom they have regular contact, such as the FRD, the Departments and the HSRC. Group address lists were set up for them, as well as individual address books. They also received some training in the Web.

The project now intends changing its modus operandi and opening up a help centre. This will allow more members of the two committees to come in for assistance with Internet problems, rather than CSIR staff going to them. Committee members will be able to bring their notebooks and receive training.

This is a small project in terms of beneficiaries but it requires substantial personnel resources. It is intended to serve as a starter project to show Parliament the benefits of ICTs, and may lead to a larger project to improve communications within and from Parliament, which currently has no LAN and uses paper based communications methods. However, it is not clear whether this project will influence decision makers in Parliament to set up electronic communications systems.

FILM-UP - Finance and Legal Management Upgrade project in Zambia - intends to enhance the dispensation of justice and financial accounting in the judiciary, ministry of legal affairs and associated institutions. The project would supply computer equipment, a local area network and supply and customise software according to client's needs. However the clients are lacking in basic technical knowledge which even enables them to put out a tender for the right equipment. It is feared that the whole project could become vendor-driven due to lack of in-house skills. There may be potential in linking this project up with another project such as ZamLII.

4.5 HUMAN RIGHTS

Four human rights projects are discussed in this section, all using ICTs to some degree for networking and information distribution.

The Inter African Network For Human Rights & Development (AFRONET) based in Lusaka, Zambia is a network of human rights organisations in 22 African countries. It promotes a human rights agenda for Africa through networking, information sharing, action-oriented programmes and advocacy work. Part of Afronet's goal is to establish a multi-country on-line communications system and expedite human rights information dissemination.

AFRONET runs a programme on governance and democracy which aims to promote democracy and good governance and is the host to the AFRONET human rights programme: women and political participation, partnership programme (networking Africa) and the recently developed litigation pilot project. The monitoring and networking programme is aimed at generating, dissemination and exchanging information on human rights cases in Africa. Monitoring also endeavours to bring to the fore abuses through case investigations and studies.

AFRONET is implemented in the following countries:
North Africa: Tunisia and Egypt;

West Africa: Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Benin, Mali;
East Africa: Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania;
Central Africa: Zaire, Rwanda, Sudan
Southern Africa: Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa,
Zambia, Zimbabwe.

This is a substantial network of 22 organisations, all involved with human rights, using e-mail for communications. AFRONET has a commitment to using ICTs and has set up a home page. The network aims to disseminate information and there appears to be scope for further use and development of ICTs. Both its programmes fall within the ambit of "governance" as defined in this study. It should also be mentioned that the programme is designed to attend to life-threatening issues on the African continent, and sets the basis for co-operation and awareness among NGOs. This could well link up with the OAU Early Warning System through the use of ICTs.

The Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) is a new unit of the UN

Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), formed to promote information exchange within the humanitarian community in the Great Lakes region of Africa. IRIN is based in Nairobi, Kenya. This region has two million refugees and humanitarian relief and rehabilitation require better management of the available information. By fostering greater awareness and understanding of regional issues, IRIN contributes to better-informed and more effective humanitarian action, including emergency preparedness.

The Network manages a dynamic and up-to-date "feed" of relevant information to and from NGOs, national authorities, UN agencies, donors, human rights organisations, political parties, regional institutions, academia and the media. New material is gathered in the region by a team of information officers working within the UN Resident Co-ordinators' offices. IRIN's updates, analyses and alerts cover the range of political, economic and social issues which affect humanitarian work in the region, from a regional perspective.

IRIN uses Internet, fax, satellite phones, HF radio, telex and hard copy for information distribution.

In addition to its own analyses, the Network collects public domain reports of UN agencies and peacekeeping operations, NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movements, the OAU and others and makes them available either in response to specific enquiries or by subscriptions to mailing lists.

Results: Not only should results be sought in more appropriate operations, but in the humanitarian culture. The Network tries to stimulate an "esprit de corps" among

the diverse disciplines (military, political, humanitarian, legal and media) responding to the complex emergency affecting the Great Lakes.

IRIN appears to have a well-organised system of collecting, analysing and distributing issue-specific information. ICTs are an integral part of its operation and their information management model could be explored further.

The InterAfrica Group is doing similar work to IRIN, but in the Horn of Africa. Inter Africa is developing a document on the institutional and substantive requirements to establish a peace promotion centre in the horn of Africa, to be funded by the UN Economic Commission on Africa. Insufficient information is available at present, although this may be an important project.

The OAU Early warning system on conflict situations in Africa is an initiative of the Organisation of African Unity, being implemented together with the UN Special Initiative on Africa (Special Initiative) and UNECA PADIS. It is a major project which will create an early warning system for conflicts in Africa, by collecting information, information exchange and analysis. It will also train people to run these systems. The OAU has set up a peace fund for this project, to which the UN Special Initiative will contribute \$100 million over five years.

The project will:

- Develop a database and analytical capability to keep track of and identify events which could be precursors to violence.
- Develop a communications capability to keep up with events throughout Africa and to communicate with OAU teams that are assigned to work on specific conflict situations.
- Set up 24-hour watch centre, run by trained military officers
- Develop a capacity to plan and co-ordinate peace operations in Africa
- Develop a network of national mediators at country level to respond quickly when violence threatens.

Information will be exchanged and centralised in databases, which will be made accessible electronically. Electronic management and sharing of information is one of the key elements of this project, which is oriented towards the use of ICTs.

Information will be distributed in a variety of ways but will include a bulletin board system (BBS); e-mail; list server and other information dissemination tools.

4.6 ELECTION MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING

New democracies in Africa require election management and monitoring. Two projects were found to be working in this area using ICTs. The first, the NDI, monitors elections and provides information, while the second is in the process of being set up to build capacity for administration of elections and to promote

professionalism and accountability in elections.

The National Democracy Institute For International Affairs (NDI Cape Town) has used ICTs in compiling a structured database of South Africa's 800+ local government councils, and 7500+ of the local councillors who serve on those councils. They have made this database available free of charge to NGOs, parties and government structures, both on disk and by printing 1000 copies of the 'National Directory of Transitional Local Authorities'. SANGONeT is making the database accessible on the Web, while the Department of Constitutional Development will maintain and build up the database. The database project involved much community co-operation and consultation with councils. Local councillors were invited to provide comments on early versions of the directory.

During the South African local government elections (February 1995 - August 1996), NDI produced 19 editions of the 'Newsflash' newsletter on election preparations, and used the contacts database and 'fax-broadcast' system to distribute the newsletter to between 300 and 800 local election administrators, NGOs, political parties, provincial and national government structures, media, etc. They distributed the newsletter by e-mail to an additional 250 recipients. The NDI has its own Internet Website, maintained by their Washington, DC, office. (<http://www.ndi.org>)

The NDI is very aware of the use of ICTs for their work. They have used ICTs for distributing information during elections through various media. There appears to be a lot of potential in their election monitoring work using ICTs.

Electoral Institute Of South Africa (EISA) is a new organisation which aims to be a resource to stakeholders in election processes in South Africa and Southern Africa. It will gather information and do research on particular electoral topics in order to encourage debate and facilitate the transition to democracy in the region. It aims to make input into policy so as to direct this transition. ICT is considered crucial to gather the largest amount and most current information in an efficient way. They plan to disseminate this information broadly, thereby spreading access to debate.

They plan to use e-mail, newsgroups, will be developing a Web site and setting up a database of electoral information on each country in Southern Africa. They will create a structured database of contacts.

EISA has pointed out that there is a lack of technical knowledge within NGOs for them to make decisions about how to use ICTs in their work. Training and education in ICTs is necessary for NGOs, such as EISA, who are trying to use them. It is suggested that the IDRC consider empowering organisations in computer-related decision-making by providing training, so that they are not dependent on computer consultants to advise them.

This organisation has incorporated the use of ICTs into its plans and is focused on the broad exchange of information in Southern Africa. They will use ICTs to obtain, collect organise and distribute information. Although they do not have a very well-developed implementation plan, as explained above, they clearly see the need and benefit of ICTs and could be assisted in this endeavour.

4.7 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / EXPRESSION

Three projects have been highlighted in the area of freedom of information and expression, although there are more, such as the independent newspapers, who use ICTs in their work.

The Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) (South Africa), is committed to freedom of expression, freedom of information and free speech and has championed the drafting and debate around a freedom of information act for South Africa. It has established a large Web site, carrying information about freedom of expression and information issues, primarily in South Africa. The FXI sees the Internet as a powerful medium for swift global communication and access. The FXI also wanted to highlight its campaigns and solicit support electronically. They provide a full text searchable database of their publications, a recently published book, and information on their activities. Using the Internet they can more easily compile their "Diary" using information received from different organisations such as the International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA).

The ongoing electronic communication project of FXI is well on its way, although the Institute has experienced some problems. Staff find that the production and maintenance of the Web site has increased the workload on staff as they do have not employed a specific person to maintain the website and the electronic publications. At the outset, the FXI ensured that two staff members underwent training in HTML to keep the site up-to-date. However they do not have the time to do this as fully as is necessary. Ongoing consultancy is provided by SANGONeT for site maintenance.

The FXI, an organisation committed to freedom of expression, has embraced ICTs as a means of publishing and receiving information, and is attempting to integrate these processes into their advocacy work. They have important information relating to freedom of expression over a number of years in South Africa, which they plan to make available electronically.

The Inter Press Service (IPS) is a media organisation with a development focus, including the promotion of governance in Africa through information and training. Their services include:

- + Human Rights and NGO Networking
- + Mainstreaming Gender

- + NGOs and Development Communication
- + Early Warning News
- + Media and Networking
- + Popularising Community Media Issues
- + Training of Francophone Journalists in reporting Human Rights and
- + Democratisation Issues

In all its projects the IPS uses ICTs to gather, disseminate and archive information and for distance training. Some of the projects have specific capacity-building in use of ICT components, while others use ICT in the post-project follow-up. IPS uses the following information tools: e-Mail, SITA-mediated X-25 PAD, list processor, Web archive, databases, fax-server, fax software, terminal login software.

All IPS projects involve awareness-raising or capacity building with a view to empowering communities, either directly or through information brokers. One project, the awareness-raising about community media, specifically involves communities.

IPS perceives a number of obstacles to its work using ICTs:

- Donor reluctance to support capital investment
- Poor telecommunications in some countries
- Lack of Internet or other ICT access in some countries
- Lack of human resource capacity

Peter da Costa of IPS comments that "We should remember that ICT in Africa cannot be developed in the same way as in the rest of the world, for reasons scores of very bright consultants from Europe, Canada, the U.S. and -- dare I say it -- Africa, have detailed ad nauseam. So let's stop talking about elitist tools such as Web, gopher, veronica, etc, and start really doing serious work about accessing "communities", in the sense of designing tools to suit the Africa reality. Even in South Africa, where ISPs are plenty, who is really benefiting from ICT? Is the 'rural' people? Is it the squatters?"

"Instead of preaching the credo of full Internet connectivity for African countries by the year 1998 or whatever, and ticking off the countries as the state or some private ISP goes live, let's look at a new paradigm, let's look at applications that will empower Africans towards self-reliance and towards interdependence in this harsh, globalised economy.. There is no shortage of African capacity to develop this new paradigm. There is only a shortage of African ownership in the projects, and a shortage of African money to drive them."

While fully invested in the process of using ICTs for the promotion of governance, da Costa offers an interesting challenge in pursuing ICT projects in sub-Saharan Africa.

MISANET, based in Windhoek, Namibia, aims to enable the members the Media

Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) to exchange information on media freedom, human rights, economic data and photographs. They will also be able to exchange ideas on issues affecting the independent media.

MISA's programme for 1994-95 is developing an electronic network (MISANET) for their chapter in countries throughout Southern Africa. Equipment and technical support is being supplied to members so that they can connect to the nearest local Internet host. Electronic subscriptions to the MISANET are also available to anyone with Internet access and an interest in Southern Africa.

5 MAJOR INITIATIVES

There are several large initiatives which need to be taken into consideration as there would be common interest in pursuing governance work through the use of ICTs. The initiatives with a focus on infrastructure, such as the World Bank's InfoDev project are not included here.

The United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa (Special Initiative) The UN has recognised the dire state of development of many of Africa's countries, as well as the positive political developments which are moving some of the countries, such as Angola, Mozambique and South Africa closer towards democracy and their entry into the global economy. However, according to the United Nations Special Initiative on Africa Booklet, 'Africa has failed to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by growth in international trade; interdependent enterprise; information technology; and investment and financial flows to developing countries.' The Special Initiative aims to address matters such as these through the themes and priorities which they have outlined.

There are two focuses important to the IDRC governance endeavour, namely 'Harnessing information technology for development' and 'Strengthening the capacity for governance', both of which will contribute to the development of Africa.

The focus on 'Harnessing information technology for development' will be implemented through: policy issues; allowing African stakeholders to promote dynamic change; setting up full Internet connectivity in pilot countries; appropriate application in key sectors to change their competitive position in the global economy, with a special focus is women's organisations and gender information; and training in computer networking and use of informatics in development decision-making.

The other important theme is on 'Strengthening the Capacity for Governance', which includes: peace building through the OAU and civil society; increasing governments' capacities for 'transparent, responsible and effective governance' and strengthening civil society.

Brought together, the two areas described above could provide a strong impetus in maximising the benefits of ICTs in governance. Ways in which the themes can work together should be sought, as no direct link is spelled out. Links are implicit or briefly mentioned in some of the Governance support areas such as 'strengthening the flow of public information and opportunities of public dialogue on development policies and programmes' and 'strengthening of parliamentary functions and electoral processes'.

G7 Pilot Projects

In February 1995, G-7 members together with the European Commission, identified a number of projects which could 'demonstrate the potential of the Information Society and stimulate its deployment.' The participation of international organisations is necessary and to be encouraged.

One of the pertinent areas is 'Government On-Line' (Project No 9). It aims to 'promote collaboration in the area of best practices and to improved public services through the increased use of on-line systems.' Its three themes are to: increase the 'use of electronic mail for communications with and within government; the provision to the public of on-line services; and the development of transaction processing services for more complex transactions.'

The pilot projects are open to G7 and non-G7 countries. In its submission to the ISAD Conference in May 1996, South Africa proposed that it should establish Information Society Pilot Projects, and collaborate with other developing countries in Developing World Information Society Pilot Projects. Government On-Line is one of the five proposed projects.

UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA): Africa's Information Society Initiative (AISII)

A conference of the Conference of Ministers in May 1996 passed a resolution regarding the development of Africa's Information Society. Its vision is 'for the building of information and decision support systems to enhance policy formulation, fostering a new generation of Africans capable of using information and communication technologies, building African information resources and linking Africa regionally and globally to the information age.' It called on the partners in the UN Special Initiative to use the AISII as a guiding framework. It

The OAU Early warning system on conflict situations in Africa is an initiative of the Organisation of African Unity, being implemented together with the UN Special Initiative on Africa (Special Initiative) and UNECA PADIS. It is a major project which will collect, exchange and analyse information by means of ICTs. It will also train people to run these systems. The OAU has set up a peace fund for this project, to which the UN Special Initiative will contribute \$100 million over five years. The project is described in more detail in the section on Human Rights.

6 BUILDING CONTENTS FOR GOVERNANCE

Building contents to electronic networking is essential in making the governance endeavour worthwhile. The aims would include:

- to encourage government to be open and accountable by publishing or distributing information which people require.
- to get people to start using ICTs in their everyday information gathering and to benefit from the speed, convenience and cost-effectiveness of obtaining information electronically
- to enable civil society to publish their documents and views
- to give substantive value to networking by people with common interests in governance

The SANGONeT experience is important in showing the value of building content of sites and enabling people to use the technology to obtain necessary information. This has contributed to SANGONeT members using the Internet as a primary source of the information which they need urgently and would otherwise have to obtain by more difficult means.

Of all the projects surveyed, almost all are committed to building content for electronic distribution. The one exception is the installation and training project being run by the CSIR. For many this directly involves the distribution of government information, such as laws and court decisions. For nine of the organisations, for example the NDI (Cape Town), the OAU, SARDC, Governet and Diplomacy@Information. Technology, they will publish their own structured databases. Most will publish full text databases of their information and commentary relating to governance issues. Most of the sites will combine official information with their own bulletins, organisational material and networking information.

While this study has surveyed organisations who are using ICTs in their governance work, there is a large number who are involved in the same field, but who are not using ICTs at this stage. It will be important to try to bring such organisations on board so that their work is not marginalised. They might fall into the 'disconscientisation' category, where they need introduction and sensitisation to ICTs. They may lack the technical expertise or institutional capacity, although they are doing important governance work.

7 APPLICATION-BASED SOLUTIONS

Most organisations do not have a clear idea of how exactly they will use ICTs to best achieve their aims. They plan to 'set up a Web site' with their information. They do not know for example how they can reach e-mail only users using e-mail facilities such as list servers, or that this is an ideal way to enable discussion and debate, or to plan a campaign or action. They are often unaware of the available choices and their benefits. One of the organisations commented that it was

difficult to make these technical decisions because of lack of knowledge and reliance on consultants.

Of the 30 organisations surveyed, 10 plan to publish their structured databases on the Internet. Some of them have yet to develop these databases, but they have the intention of sharing them electronically. Several others already have well-populated structured databases and see the Internet as an opportunity to share this information broadly.

The Legal Resources Centre (LRC) is the only organisation planning to use Intranet for internal documents, such as precedents which it does not wish to publish publicly. It will do this in tandem with an Internet Web site where the material for public consumption will be available.

In all the projects no mention is made of obtaining Web documents by e-mail, although this service exists on a number of sites such as w3mail@gmd.de, Agora@www.undp.org - which provides service to developing countries, ww.mail@ciesin.org. and agora@kamakura.mss.co.jp. These services enable you to obtain a document on the Internet by sending an e-mail message to the server and receiving the document back by e-mail. Gopher is another possible means of obtaining , publishing and archiving information, which could be explored.

There may also be value in addressing Peter da Costa's concerns (see Freedom of Information/Expression) regarding the appropriateness of technology being used in Africa and his call for new developments which serve people's needs more directly.

8 COMMUNITY / BENEFICIARY INVOLVEMENT

It was difficult to find projects in which communities or beneficiaries had been consulted on their information and communication needs, either in the planning stages or in an evaluative process.

A project such as AFRONET had networking as its aim and grew from discussions with participants. This provided the impetus for networking and sharing information. In some projects there is direct community involvement, such as the IPS community media training or the NDI (Cape Town) which held discussions with local government officials for obtaining information and then for feedback on the directories they produced.

For the most part beneficiaries were not explicitly consulted about the project. If future projects are to achieve their aims with known constituencies, or if the development of a specific community or region is the aim, it would be worthwhile incorporating direct community needs in projects and soliciting community support and involvement.

9 CAPACITY BUILDING

The use of ICTs is new in many countries and in many organisations, and it would seem that efforts to train people in how to use ICTs as well as how to use the information should be integral to any project. Thirteen of the projects surveyed included a training and capacity building element. Seven did not include training, and it was unknown if the remaining 10 had a training component.

Bringing new technologies and new tasks into organisations raises the issue of institutional capacity. Organisations can become overburdened with work or suffer from a surfeit of information which they can't handle. An example of this is the FXI, in Johannesburg, which set up a Web site and underwent training in HTML in order to maintain it. They find, however, that their normal workload does not permit them to spend the necessary time doing HTML conversion. In addition they do not have the time to develop skills to work on the overall planning, restructuring, efficacy etc of their site, although they want it to make impact. They have contracted SANGONeT, a local NGO ISP to do much of the work for them.

A further capacity issue was raised by the Electoral Institute of South Africa. It commented that they do not have the capacity or knowledge to make informed decisions about the use of ICTs. They said: "In fact, one very important result of this survey which the IDRC is conducting could be to offer training to NGOs like ourselves to help us plan and strategise a thorough use of technology once we have decided to include it in our projects."

The lack of technical knowledge is not exclusive to NGOs however, and was raised in relation to the FILM-UP project in Zambia. The vendor said that the Ministry of Legal Affairs lacked basic technical knowledge to prepare a tender request for the right equipment. A lack of in-house skills could render the Ministry totally dependent on the company supplying the equipment.

10 INTERACTION THROUGH THE USE OF ICTs

The Internet is not a medium only for the static presentation and archiving of information. It is an important mechanism for interaction between people. Many of the available applications allow for such interaction and governments could use opportunities more to involve civil society in democratic process.

Being able to send e-mail from a Web site to a member of parliament or other official is a very basic means of interaction. It is noteworthy that there are few members of parliament in any country surveyed who have e-mail addresses. The exception is South Africa where the ANC in particular has made a concerted effort to put M.P.s on-line. This allows for a free exchange of ideas which might not take place through the relative formality required of print letters.

NGOs and the private sector have long been using e-mail, and they are often the

ones to encourage government to use ICTs. However, from those surveyed there was very little sense that the Internet should be used in an interactive way. This is an aspect that could be taken further if ICTs in governance are to serve their purpose.

11 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND EXPRESSION

Constitutional protection of freedom of information and related legislation enables citizens to expect and receive information from their governments and governmental bodies. Governments may be constitutionally bound, as is the case in South Africa, and have legislation which outlines the mechanisms for provision of information, although no such legislation was found to exist in any country in Africa.

However, one should not assume that all African cultures consider that information should be freely available to all whenever it is needed. Withholding of information is a means of holding power, and when freedom of information is introduced it may have significant cultural implications according to Gerry Grant of GOVERNMENT. The Internet has the potential to increase citizens' oversight of government affairs and to decentralize political decision-making which may be highly threatening to a government unfamiliar with publicising information (as opposed to propaganda).

There is censorship of the Internet in numerous countries, taking place through legislation (the US), through government controlled gateways (Vietnam and Saudi Arabia) through exorbitant charges (India), cutting off access to particular sites (Germany) and registration requirements (Singapore). To maximize the Global Information Infrastructure's potential to promote democracy, it must adopt and expand upon international standards of free expression. National and international guarantees of free expression should be expressly extended to the Internet (Human Rights Watch, May 1996). A further type of censorship in Africa is the lack of infrastructure plus governments' tardiness or unwillingness to make information available electronically.

Zambia recently had a case of Internet censorship when The Post, an independent daily with a Web site carrying full-text stories from the paper, was banned because a story was apparently based on leaked government documents. The paper remained on the site for two days, until the ISP, ZAMNET, became aware that it would be held liable, and removed it. Two days later three editors of the paper were arrested. Although it is popularly reported that the Zambian government set up the ZANA/ZIS site running Zambia Today in response to the 5 February banning of The Post, this is not the case according to the ZAMNET sysop. In fact the ZANA/ZIS site had gone up several days before the ban. However the Government press undoubtedly decided to publish on the Internet in response to the perceived negative international image the Post was presenting

The area of freedom of information and expression is clearly one which could impede the availability of African government information on-line and encourage censorship. It may be suggested that policy work in this area is required if governance projects are to succeed. This could also be done in policy development regarding telecommunications so that it reinforces freedom of information.

12 CONSCIENTISATION

One of the issues which has been raised in several project documents is the need for awareness-raising among government officials as to the value of ICTs and the benefits they can bring to good governance. Government officials who may need to make policy and decisions about ICTs have not in fact had the opportunity to use computers and may hold ill-informed or prejudiced views. Conscientisation would be required and could use the Africa Information Society Initiative as a starting point for discussion of the challenges and opportunities offered by ICTs.

13 EVALUATION METHODS

Of the 30 projects surveyed, only 5 said they had had, or plan, an evaluation of any sort, including on-the-job critique, formal evaluation, monitoring and in-house evaluation. This means that (according to the limited information available) 25 of the projects will continue without undergoing any evaluative process. Insufficient information is available to assess the methods of evaluation used by project. This issue would need more attention in future planning of projects.

14 CONCLUSION

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa are at the early stages of embracing or even acknowledging ICTs. Many are new to democratic process, free and open debate and sharing of information. In addition they may not easily see the benefit of ICTs when their populations are suffering the most extreme deprivation and poverty, particularly when this requires the implementation or improvement of major infrastructure in the country.

Undoubtedly, however this study has shown that there is need for ICT projects and those that exist are slotting into a range of different areas. While each country has different needs and starting points, projects may need to start by conscientising government and NGOs as to the benefits of ICTs and, in the case of this study, how they will assist in the promotion of good governance and democratisation. Once infrastructure is in place, specific ICT projects which build capacity and enable full use of ICTs need to be put implemented in order to achieve the aims of open, transparent, accountable and democratic governance.

15 CASE STUDIES

15.1 GOVERNET, Malta

GOVERNET is a project initiated by the Commonwealth Secretariat under the auspices of COMNET-IT. It networks regionally, bringing together public sector administrative and management reform professionals in Eastern and Southern Africa. The network aims to facilitate the exchange of information between senior public sector workers, academics and management specialists, so as to bring about reform in public sector management. It provides them with access to electronic media and discussion fora as well as information in their area of work, such as databases and exchange of training curricula. Ultimately the project should influence key planners in governments of the Commonwealth.

GOVERNET was launched at a workshop in April 1994 where participants were given training in electronic networking and how to set up a network node. They were given a network start up pack, including software. Modems were supplied to some, while others already had modems and some have remained without. This has proved an ongoing problem, however, as some institutions have still not been connected.

In May 1995 a second training initiative was undertaken at a workshop co-ordinated by SANGONeT in Johannesburg, South Africa, to train trainers in electronic networking. While the training included technical skills, it also focused on the use of the electronic network to build working relations among professionals, and how to use these skills in organisations. At the end of the workshop, participants assigned themselves tasks to ensure they took their skills and collaboration forward.

Capacity building is inherent in the project. The workshop held in Johannesburg took this a step further by training trainers and discussing ways to implement electronic networking within their organisations.

GOVERNET has not yet become fully functional as a network and a number of problems have been appropriately identified by the project co-ordinator, Gerry Grant. These problems provide salutary insights in setting up an ICT project:

1. Failure of the Commonwealth Secretariat to deliver the modems expeditiously
2. Staff turnover in the Commonwealth Secretariat and in AMTIESA, and the lack of a champion for the project.
3. Unreliable telecommunications infrastructure in many countries.
4. Electronic communications are not integrated in to the infrastructure and processes of the organisations and remain peripheral to work functions.
5. Restrictive regulatory environments for information service provision impede the development of electronic networking services. It is suggested that international agencies can influence governments to allow for more flexibility in regulations

regarding information service provision.

GOVERNET is in its early stages of development and plans future growth. Recognising that conditions differ between countries, the points of weakness highlighted could be taken into account in planning other projects in sub-Saharan Africa.

15.2 Legi-Link, Cape Town, South Africa

Legi-link is a small business which provides information links between Parliament and civil society interest groups. Experience showed that there was a gap in the information accessible to such groups from the National Parliamentary process and that people needed this information in order to make appropriate interventions.

Information created by Legi-link is kept in four structured databases, while full-text policy documents are stored in hard copy or scanned. Legi-link has, in the past year, come to rely heavily on e-mail to communicate information to their users, although fax is still used for clients without e-mail and for documents not available in computer readable form. Legi-link is considering putting up a Web site, but is constrained by lack of funding. They see this as an important aspect to creating broader access to government information. They have, however, supplied other organisations with important documents to upload onto the Internet.

Legi-Link is unique in its systems approach to handling Government information. It brings together the different streams of information from the Parliamentary process and creates meaningful and orderly access to it. A major area of work is synthesizing information about the passage of bills through parliament, which is essential to making appropriate interventions.

Legi-link has developed substantial expertise in the workings of Parliament and has used this knowledge to create a much needed service in South Africa's fledgling democracy. Many players in the political arena have been unfamiliar with the intricacies of Parliament and such a service is necessary to help open up the participative process to all citizens. It should be added that even members of the provincial legislatures are recognising the need for reworked information from the national parliament in order to keep up-to-date.

Feedback from organisations indicates that they rely on Legi-link, sometimes at moments of particular importance or urgency. They use the service to know what bills are going through Parliament, at what stage they are, when and where they can make submissions to committees, who the key players are, and many other related issues. Legi-link has thus empowered and developed skills in a number of organisations to understand and relate to Parliament effectively. In addition to information provision, Legi-link recognises that a more developed training approach is necessary to take their

work forward.

15.3 Networking Project "Diplomacy@Information.Technology", Malta

This project, implemented by the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, aims to develop a network between diplomatic and international relations institutes in Malta, Geneva, Yaounde, Nairobi, Trinidad and Tobago. Through this network, the project will promote the use of ICTs in diplomatic activities and international relations. The project has ICTs at its core, aiming not only to use ICTS for networking and information sharing, but also to influence policy in the use of information technology for diplomacy.

Three major objectives are targetted:

- 1 to increase awareness of ICT for development among policy and decision-makers;
- 2 to assist countries with limited human and financial resources to participate meaningfully in bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations through the use of ICT;
- 3 to develop regional centres of excellence in Africa for the use of ICTs in diplomacy.

The project is in its first two-year phase, having begun on 1 October 1995. During this phase, the project is creating regional centres of excellence with the following activities: installing hardware and software infrastructure; human resource capacity building; and initiating courses on ICT and diplomacy. On 15 September an integrated teaching and research system for all institutes in the network will be launched.

In the second phase, these regional centres should undertake activities towards computerisation of Ministries of Foreign Affairs in their respective regions.

The project is innovative in creating research and teaching systems between institutions from five different regions. It offers considerable opportunities for comparative regional research, distance learning and sharing of resources at the institutes and to the ministries of foreign affairs. Already, the students and staff who have been trained in Nairobi are successfully using ICT tools. Training has begun in Yaounde, although the lack of full Internet access is experienced as a problem. The project runs its own website with access to different databases, thereby sharing information between participants.

This networking project has explicitly been targeted at junior diplomats, who will be well-placed in the future to influence policy and decision-making on ICTs. The project will familiarise them with the use of ICTs and thus enable them to

contribute positively to ICT policies nationally and in international relations.

15.4 SANGONeT Open Government Project, Johannesburg, South Africa

SANGONeT is a non-profit Internet Service provider. As it perceived the Web as the primary tool for future Internet information access, SANGONeT took the opportunity to launch its site in August 1995, becoming a major source of governance information for organisations involved in development work in South Africa.

The site covers issues such as Open Government, the Environment, Health, Labour, Women, Development, Information and Technology. SANGONeT publishes all government documents which it is able to obtain electronically, focusing particularly on policy issues. It provides tools for searching documents and for searching across the site to do comparative policy work. The Open Government site provides links to many overseas sites where information can be sourced, and which can also serve as examples of how other agencies are providing open access to information. SANGONeT also encourages government ministries, departments and statutory bodies to set up their own sites and has set up sites for the Department of Land Affairs and the Independent Broadcasting Authority, a statutory body.

The electronic debate would be one-sided without NGOs being able to set up their own Web sites. SANGONeT therefore enables NGOs to develop Web resources and publish their own information. SANGONeT aims to empower organisations to use the Internet as a vibrant participative tool for exchanging ideas and information in the development of democracy in South Africa.

SANGONeT provides information services specific to users' needs such as setting up specialist and/or private Web sites. This was done for the drafting of the Science and Technology policy paper and the Environmental policy paper (projects sponsored by the IDRC). An interactive process was created where drafters and participants were able to interact and share information and ideas by e-mail and the Web. The sites included discussion through a list server echoed to the Web site, publishing of draft documents and background papers, terms of reference, contact lists etc.

SANGONeT is used by its members for lobbying. For example, a group dealing with reproductive rights is running a very active list server on which it distributes information, holds discussions, organises campaigns and plans its lobbying strategies. This group has been successful in ensuring that all participants had modems and received training. Another NGO recently received SANGONeT assistance for on-line research in its campaign against censorship of the Internet.

SANGONeT perceives certain shortcomings with its promotion of information and

communication for good governance. It considers that it has not been sufficiently proactive in local content development, although it has succeeded in playing a facilitative role for groups which request its services. SANGONeT also finds that its users do not use the APC (Association of Progressive Communications) conferences very much, although they contain a wealth of development information. It has not promoted these sufficiently as sources of valuable information and as a means of participating in informative global discussions.

16 LIST OF EXPERTS

This list of experts is offered tentatively. They are people working in the field of governance with whom I had contact during the course of information gathering. I have not been able to pursue their expertise further.

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