

IDRC - Lih. 108358

## APC Africa Strategy Development Meeting Report

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IDRC Study/Acacia Initiative  
February 8-11, 1997  
Johannesburg, South Africa

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## **\*\* Context \*\***

Internet connectivity in Africa is becoming a reality. However, recent initiatives for African networking are being driven from outside Africa, by donor agencies and foreign companies.

Over the last 10 years, a large number of small, low-cost networks have emerged throughout the continent. APC's African network service providers and information partners are essential actors in Africa's development context: they play a critical role in facilitating the work of non-governmental and community organizations, international and local funders and development agencies, and members of civil society who work for social justice, democracy and empowerment in Africa.

Many of APC's African networks now confront the very real danger of extinction. They have always faced financial insecurity, the constraints of inadequate infrastructure and constantly changing technologies. Now these networks also face intensive competition from commercial providers and a challenging ICT regulatory environment. There is an immediate need to establish an African development networking strategy from within Africa. For this reason, APC decided to hold the African Strategy Development meeting. APC partner network representatives, development information providers and media networks, APC Women's Programme in Africa representatives, partner institutions and donor agencies attended a 4-day meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa hosted by SANGONeT (South African APC member) and funded by IDRC.

The primary objective of the meeting was to develop an action framework and coordinated strategies to address the following:

- ☐ mobilization of existing knowledge about development networking in Africa
- ☐ building the capacity of information providers to develop and make local information resources available
- ☐ building strategic partnerships between service providers and information content providers

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- building the institutional capacity of development service providers to meet the needs of their constituencies
- implementation of Regional Help Desks
- providing an opportunity for partner institutions (e.g., IDRC - Acacia and USAID AfricaLink) and APC partner networks in Africa to exchange perspectives, plans and experiences.

Participants used small group discussion, plenaries, case studies and presentations on key issues of concern to analyse the situation of development networking in Africa from national, regional and Africa-wide perspectives. Activities included:

- analysis of network services, goals and communities
- analysis of opportunities and threats
- case studies of community-relevant content development
- case studies of network service provider situations
- mapping of APC Africa's strategic initiatives to the overall APC program framework.

Outcomes included:

- overall African networking strategy framework
- immediate action plan
- recommendations to donor and regulatory agencies for African ICT implementation.

It is clear from this meeting that APC African networks and information providers are inseparable partners with civil society in working for Africa's development. Numerous opportunities for enhancing the capacity of APC Africa to participate in this crucial role emerged and are presented here.

### **\*\* Meeting Highlights \*\***

The APC Africa meeting was a highly successful undertaking that resulted in several key achievements:

- APC Africa Entity: African networks and information providers affiliated with the APC agreed to establish themselves as a unique coalition -- APC Africa, which will foster increased collaboration across the continent and a stronger relationship with the umbrella APC. The group drafted a mission statement:
- "APC Africa is a broad spectrum of people/groups involved in electronic networking in Africa, working with civil society and information providers, providing access to electronic technologies, relevant information, technical expertise and human linkages, in order to empower, raise awareness, build skills, forge partnerships and advocate."
- Action Plan: Participants identified needs and opportunities and developed a common plan for action, including both immediate tasks and longer-term initiatives.
- Capacity Building Proposal in Development: Not only were immediate tasks defined and delegated, but the elements of an overall African Networking Capacity Building proposal were mapped out.
- Acacia Consultation: APC had the opportunity to learn more about and respond to IDRC's Acacia initiative. A remarkably close mapping between Acacia areas of concentration and APC's proposed program areas emerged.

### **\*\*\*\* Acacia Consultation \*\***

The APC Africa meeting participants divided into 3 groups (Southern Africa/Eastern Africa/francophone West Africa) to address the 4 areas of concentration in IDRC's Acacia Initiative:

- ☐ Policy
- ☐ Infrastructure
- ☐ ICT Technologies and Tools
- ☐ Applications, Services and Networks

Acacia's cross-cutting issues were addressed within these 4 areas.

Following is a summary of the issues of key concern to APC Africa in each area and recommendations for addressing them.

## **1. Policy**

### **>>> Key Concerns**

- ☐ lack of coherent, national and regional IT policies, and no easily accessible information about policies where they do exist
- ☐ lack of policy to regulate how investment is made in expanding connectivity across the continent, especially regarding ensuring equitable access and appropriate infrastructure
- ☐ neither community needs nor gender issues are being considered in ICT policy development
- ☐ liberalisation of African connectivity policies favour urban areas over rural areas
- ☐ poor government understanding of Internet in general
- ☐ Internet licensing and subscription fees extremely (and often prohibitively) high and the licensing process is usually difficult, and frequently exclusionary
- ☐ local PTTs are often monopolies concerned with profiting from Internet services delivery, rather than providing a useful service to the community
- ☐ commercial ISPs do not consider community needs
- ☐ cost of Internet connections is high for end-users

### **>>> APC Africa Recommendations**

#### **Awareness-Raising**

ICTs are rapidly being established across Africa with insufficient attention by all sectors of society to the positive and negative implications of their introduction. A program of awareness-raising should be undertaken to ensure that ICTs are implemented in ways that support beneficial community development. In particular:

- ☐ Workshops/symposia and forums on ICT issues should be made available to civil society
- ☐ African governments, IT decision-making bodies and funders need to be educated on community considerations in IT policy development

#### **Collaboration**

There are numerous distinct initiatives being undertaken within the private, public, academic and funding sectors regarding the introduction of ICTs into Africa. These networking initiatives need to be brought together to inform one another and to collaborate more closely in order to avoid duplication and working at cross purposes. Recommended steps include:

- ☐ Identifying all of the interest groups/stakeholders and interactions that currently exist in the African ICT framework at the Africa-wide, regional and national levels, e.g., Acacia, UN SIA/HITD, AIF, CABECA, APC African networks, etc.
- ☐ Acknowledging and supporting African networking initiatives currently underway while developing ICT strategies - across Africa there already exist small community-based

initiatives that need support that will help to inform ICT policy development as it proceeds.

## **Participatory Policy Development**

At the Africa-wide, regional and national levels, there must be an inclusive, consultative and participatory approach to IT policy development. In particular:

- Communities should be asked to identify their specific IT needs and concerns.
- Women's voices have not been heard in African IT policy development - women must be included, and their ability to participate effectively must be ensured through proactive programs of technical skills-building and awareness-raising.
- Stakeholders from all sectors should develop a policy checklist or "bill of rights" that must be addressed in every country's IT policy.

## **2. Infrastructure**

### **>>> Key Concerns**

- lack of access to sufficient information on which infrastructure currently exists, whether it is appropriate and which infrastructure is still needed
- emphasis on implementing the latest WWW-based applications, which are only accessible to an elite minority of the community, instead of working with and improving already existing appropriate tools much emphasis
- regulations that prohibit the use of alternative Internet access methods (e.g., SITA, VSAT and other wireless technologies)
- lack of sufficient, relevant training and support for network system operators, and limited system administration human resource pool
- difficulty in retaining system administration staff committed to community-based networking as more lucrative offers are made by private, public and academic sectors

### **>>> APC Africa Recommendations**

#### **Appropriate Infrastructure Development**

Decisions regarding African ICT infrastructure must take into account the community's ability to access and make effective use of the technologies. Currently there is a divergence between infrastructure development and its accessibility. The following should be considered:

- Simple, low-bandwidth technologies such as Fido, e-mail access to information resources, and text-only interfaces are within the reach of a much larger segment of the African population. These tools should be upgraded and preserved within the range of available ICTs and there should be investment in the development of mid-level 'bridging' technologies.
- Numerous communities lack even the most basic infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Telecentres with interfaces to other communications media such as wireless radio, should be considered.

#### **System Operator Training and Support**

It is crucial that African network system operators continue to build their skills to keep pace with the changing ICT environment. They would also benefit from increased collaboration. Recommendations include:

- Developing an African system operator training program which would include: reinforcing knowledge of existing tools, introduction to new tools, on-site clinics by experts, internships and workshops on specific issues, with a particular emphasis on developing the skills of women technicians.
- Increased information sharing via Africa-wide mailing lists, online meetings and periodic

face-to-face meetings.

### **Implementing Regional Help Desks**

In order to strengthen the networking infrastructure across Africa, APC Africa recommends the development of Regional Help Desks that would provide a full range of support to networks in the region, including technical, management and information training and ongoing support both remotely and through visits.

## **3. ICT Technologies and Tools**

### **>>> Key Concerns**

- ☐ networking tools aren't geared to local technical capacity; and the ones that are need further development
- ☐ no concerted funding effort anywhere responding to relevant training needs e.g., LINUX; emphasis is on high-end WWW-based applications
- ☐ need to continue developing low and mid-level technologies
- ☐ WWW-based resources are inaccessible to most African communities
- ☐ lack of user-friendly appropriate end-user access and navigation tools

### **>>> APC Africa Recommendations**

#### **Appropriate Software Development**

Current trends in Internet software development favour resource-intensive, expensive applications. Neither APC Africa's network service providers, nor APC's constituency are in a position to take advantage of these. Following are realistic recommendations:

- ☐ Server and end-user software development that supports resource access by alternative means, e-mail access to WWW, mail-to databases, etc.
- ☐ Development of tools to facilitate the dissemination and exchange of information.
- ☐ Improvements to file encoding/decoding in end-user software.

#### **Emphasise Bridging Mechanisms**

Many communities have limited access to communications infrastructure of any sort. Development of tools that bridge the gap between Internet-connected and non-connected populations are critical. Some alternatives include:

- ☐ Integrate existing means of communication (e.g., oral culture, community radio) in the planning of ICT tools and technologies.
- ☐ Identifying appropriate "relays" in the end-user community, such as Internet-connected individuals or alternative technology interfaces (e.g., radio) that will provide a bridge between the technologies and the groups concerned.

## **4. Applications, Services and Networks**

### **>>> Key Concerns**

- ☐ relationship between commercial ISPs and communities they serve is exclusively profit-oriented
- ☐ too much of a donor focus on connectivity/technology instead of content/information-sharing
- ☐ content/information-sharing support capacity isn't developed sufficiently to meet community needs
- ☐ content isn't local, relevant or available in indigenous languages

- marginalized non-connected groups aren't being reached/cannot access

## **>>> APC Africa Recommendations**

### **Information Broker Facility**

Developing mechanisms that will allow communities to easily find and effectively use relevant Internet information resources is a key ICT area that is receiving insufficient attention and support. APC Africa has developed the concept of the "information broker" function to address this. The role of the information broker is to seek out resources that match community needs, and to support the sharing of those resources. Components include:

- Developing an African regional information broker capacity building and training program, which would include training in the use of information navigation software.
- Developing information tools to support information brokers in their work, such as a thematic database of information brokers and resources in Africa and in APC.
- Identifying community-based information broker representatives for marginalized communities that would share information relevant to the community itself using the most appropriate means (e.g., TV, radio, community meetings, etc.). These people would also represent community needs in ICT policy development.
- Developing interactive (i.e., human-mediated) "response centres" instead of content centres, that would emphasize responding directly to specific community information needs instead of shunting static collections of information around from place to place.

### **Content Development Strategies**

Critical to making the Internet a useful place for individuals and communities, is the development of relevant content in local languages. This would involve:

- Developing and implementing a training program to teach content providers how to produce, package and disseminate content (e.g., news services, NGO newsletters, bulletins, etc.)
- Identifying and digitizing existing indigenous African information resources
- Developing the capacity of information brokers to package this content to meet the needs of diverse communities.
- Making links between specific content and target groups: e.g., RIOD (Reseau International d'ONG sur la Desertification) in its promoting access of rural communities to desertification information.
- Sourcing information in relevant languages: French, Portuguese, African languages.

### **Community Partner Relations**

APC is committed to providing useful and appropriate access to ICTs by civil society. To achieve this, the following activities are necessary:

- Training community users on technical operation and potential uses of networks.
- Developing methodologies and models for effective civil society networking, and documenting these.
- Using the information broker role to encourage sharing of information among and linking among community members.
- Working with specific communities (e.g., women, human rights organizations, etc.) to identify ICT needs and implement networking: providing infrastructure support, training, ongoing contact, content development support.

## **\*\* APC Program Areas \*\***

APC has been undertaking a year-long strategic planning process across all member

networks. A proposed new programmatic framework has emerged from this process that is very compatible with the areas of concentration that make up IDRC's Acacia initiative.

Following are APC's proposed new programmatic areas:

1. Supporting Electronic Networks
2. Promoting Strategic Use of ICTs among Partner Communities
3. Developing Information Content and Tools
4. Lobbying and Advocacy

Much of the APC Africa Meeting was devoted to analyzing African networking needs and opportunities using the APC program areas as a framework.

## **\*\* APC Africa Action Framework \*\***

The key objective of the APC Africa meeting was to produce an action plan for coordinating the development of networking initiatives in the region. Activities were sorted into three categories: Projects, Immediate Tasks and Cross-Cutting Activities. Projects will require funding, and a full proposal for an Africa capacity building program will be developed out of these. Immediate Tasks are things that can be undertaken right away with existing resources. Cross-Cutting Activities are those that affect all of the program areas. Following is a summary (rough) of projects and immediate tasks identified by participants.

### **1. Projects**

#### **Supporting Electronic Networks**

- ☐ Gender Balance among Sysops
- ☐ information sharing
- ☐ training - sysops
- ☐ help desks
- ☐ hubbing
- ☐ harmonization of technologies
- ☐ continued infrastructure development (rural/urban)

#### **Promoting Strategic Uses**

- ☐ training
- ☐ developing methodologies
- ☐ info brokerage project
- ☐ identifying strategic areas of focus
- ☐ user databases project: NGOs/profiles/thematic
- ☐ awareness raising/alliance building of strategic communities

#### **Developing Information Content and Tools**

- ☐ email databases/software development/mail-to databases
- ☐ training of info brokers on tools
- ☐ offshore Web services
- ☐ manuals in french/other langs
- ☐ training of content providers
- ☐ electronicising existing indigenous info/disseminating
- ☐ thematic directory of info-brokers in Africa

## **Lobbying and Advocacy**

- ☐ ICT sensitization seminars/symposiums -
- ☐ funders database and initiatives
- ☐ APC lobbying Strategic plan (for Africa)
- ☐ info kit on regions/policies

## **2. Immediate Tasks**

### **Supporting Electronic Networks**

- ☐ updating APC conf list
- ☐ laptops for sysops and info brokers
- ☐ sharing info: listservs/online meetings/closed confs - for sysops/infobrokers
- ☐ survey of network technologies
- ☐ find invisible women sysops

### **Promoting Strategic Uses**

- ☐ listserv of best practices/info-sharing
- ☐ APC user lists

### **Developing Information Content and Tools**

- ☐ identify existing initiatives - share; incl APC members
- ☐ listserv moderation
- ☐ offshore Web services: needs/who will host/strategic/dynamic intranets -->extranets
- ☐ strategic survey of resources/dynamic relations between local use and offshore

## **Lobbying and Advocacy**

- ☐ seat on AISI technology advisory group
- ☐ Acacia advisory role
- ☐ translate APC docs
- ☐ presence at decision-making fora (listserv to keep track)
- ☐ contact with donors
- ☐ set up APC Africa entity
- ☐ help AISI advise on \$10M
- ☐ survey national policies
- ☐ upcoming meetings
- ☐ consumer watchdogs

## **Cross-Cutting Projects**

- ☐ APC Gender Policy for all Activities
- ☐ APC Training program
- ☐ Help Desks
- ☐ Coordinating Mechanisms

## **\*\* APC Africa Action Plan \*\***

The group prioritized the Action Framework into the following Action Plan, which was ratified and is presently underway.

## **Projects**

### **Development of System Operator Training Program**



- ☐ identify needs
- ☐ identify existing workshops/resource people
- ☐ define internship/training/expert/workshop program

Who: Charles/Na'eem/Fred/Moussa/APC Women's Program

Deadline: March 31/97

### **Manuals in Multiple Languages (French, Portuguese, African languages)**

- ☐ identify existing user-friendly resources
- ☐ needs assessment

Who: Jill

Deadline: May 31/97

### **Information Brokerage Project Development**

- ☐ identify needs
- ☐ survey existing initiatives
- ☐ define training component: for information brokers and content providers
- ☐ research/identification/analysis of need for documentation

Who: Marie-Helene/Penda/Mercy/Regina/Peter/APC Women's Programme

Deadline: April 30/97

### **Infrastructure Development**

- ☐ propose ways for APC to work on extending networking initiatives in Africa

Who: Lishan/CABECA

Deadline: April 30/97

### **E-mail Tools**

- ☐ identify existing tools
- ☐ share information/tools
- ☐ identify needs

Who: Charles/Ben

Deadline: March 31/97

### **Laptops for System Operators /Information Brokers**

- ☐ scout about for new or used laptops

Who: Jeff

Deadline: ongoing

### **Gender Balance among System Operators**

- ☐ identify female techies working in and about APC
- ☐ identify potential female techies

Who: APC Women's Program

Deadline: ongoing

### **AIISI \$10M**

- ☐ submit ideas to UNECA for advising Regional Bureau of Africa on how to spend \$10M on African networking infrastructure

Who: Lishan

Deadline: Feb 28/97

**Sharing Information**

- ☐ propose set of mailing lists to meet needs identified at this meeting
- ☐ set them up

Who: Charles/Ben

Deadline: March 31/97

**Cross-Cutting Projects****APC Africa Coordinating Mechanisms :**

- ☐ Overall: Marie-Helene/Anriette/Na'eem/Peter
- ☐ Francophone: Moussa/Marie-Helene
- ☐ Eastern: Charles/Fred
- ☐ Southern: Anriette/Na'eem
- ☐ see that action projects listed here are completed
- ☐ build proposal for overall APC Africa Program and coordination

When: till May 31/97

**APC Gender Policy for All Activities**

- ☐ draft gender policy to be incorporated into all APC activities

Who: APC Women's Program

When: May 31/97

**Help Desks**

- ☐ finish developing the help desk concept

Who: Marietta/Moussa/Charles/Na'eem/Lishan

Deadline: Feb 28/97

**Immediate Actions**

- ☐ Updating APC Conferences List

Who: Karen

Deadline: March 31/97

- ☐ Set up APC Africa Listservs

Who: Charles/Ben

Deadline: March 31/97

- ☐ Learn How to Hold Online Meetings

Who: Amalia/Charles /Maureen

Deadline: Feb 28/97

- ☐ Survey of APC Africa Network Technologies

Who: Lishan

Deadline: March 31/97

- ☐ Finding Invisible Women Sysops

Who: APC Women's Program

Deadline: March 31/97

- ☐ Sharing APC User Lists

Who: APC Secretariat

Deadline: April 30/97

- ☐ Identify Existing Tools

Who: Charles/Ben

Deadline: March 31/97

- ☐ Listserv Moderation for Info Projects

Who: Charles/Mercy/Penda

Deadline: Feb 28/97

- ☐ Offshore Web

Who: Charles/Anna

Deadline: March 31/97

- ☐ AISI Technical Advisory Group

Who: Anriette

- ☐ APC Rep for Acacia

Who: Regina

- ☐ Translating APC Docs

Who:

- ☐ Portuguese: AngoNet
- ☐ French: Enda
- ☐ Meeting Report: IDRC
- ☐ Ensure APC Presence at Decision-making Fora (Listserv)

Who: Lishan/Ben/Nancy

Deadline: March 31/97 (for listserv)

- ☐ Contact with Donors Listserv

Who: All

Deadline: March 31/97 (for listserv)

- ☐ Developing APC Africa Entity proposal

Who: Moussa

Deadline: Feb 28/97

- ☐ National IT Policy Information Sharing

Who: SANGONeT

Deadline: March 31/97

- ☐ Bridging Grant for APC Africa Coordination

Who: Anriette/Peter/APC Secretariat/GreenNet

Deadline: March 31/97

## **APC Women's Program**

Discussions and Presentations: Feb 8-11, 1997 APC Africa Meeting

### **APC Women's Program**

- running since 1993: Beijing UNWCW meeting was initial impetus
- APC-wide program for a particular strategic community (i.e., women)
- activities cut across all of the proposed APC program areas
- large component of program funded by IDRC (Gender and Information Technology - GIT)
- program activities include: workshops, training, research, promotion
- springboard for projects to take off of their own accord
- developing diverse inter-linked networks and human support networks
- "moral" support network as much as a technical one
- ACACIA: APC women's program informing ACACIA
- women's program reps are not paid, commitment is why it's happening

### **Discussion**

Q. Is the framework/activities of the women's program transferable to other marginalized groups? IDRC is interested in reaching youth in developing countries - could it work the same way?

- APC women's program got impetus from Beijing conference (as focal point)
- GIT methodology is well designed range of activities that take holistic view to build an emerging network
- workshops have addressed both technical and policy issues: users and technicians participating and working together
- program addresses alienation of users from technicians: keeping both sides aware of each other's needs
- program focal points: 22-25 women around world who help out - can be staff of APC member/partner/NGOs and other representatives
- how to replicate this commitment in another group? needs diverse participation; the reason the program works isn't just that it's women working on this program... range of activities needs to be addressed to respond to needs, so yes it can be replicated with the right mix
- also, need to look at lessons learned from APC Women's Program; maybe not implant Women's program to other groups, but learn from what it's done
- women's program was responsive to needs: immediate needs like Beijing; but also has been proactive - has anticipated interventions - APC needs to do more of this - working at local level, thematic level and promote strategic use among our target communities (need tools to help us do this)
- APC' new programs: how to develop thematic user groups - e.g., IEARN using APC's structure - connecting students from all over the world, teachers and students working together - harder when people don't have a real purpose to communicate; enormous potential for this kind of work - APC has structure in place to do this

### **APC Women's Program Presentation**

- looked at the distinction between gender roles and sex roles in women's relationship to ICTs

### **Why the Women's Programme?**

- Women's non-participation in development in general and in ICTs are the creation of society - the APC Women's Programme is here to change the patriarchal society's thinking that men are better at handling ICTs.

## □ Gender Roles/Sex Roles

Sex roles are jobs women do that are pre-determined by their biology, e.g., childbearing, breastfeeding, etc.

Gender roles are functions assigned to women with no biological basis, e.g., childrearing.

### □ Sketch

Using humorous popular theatre, women meeting participants acted out a donor decision-making meeting scenario and an ISP technical support scenario to illustrate how women have been marginalized from participation in the development and implementation of ICTs. The audience was requested to identify and reflect on gender issues that were raised by the sketch. A discussion of these issues took place and the following suggestions were collected:

### Mechanisms to Mainstream Gender Issues in APC

- policy on gender that gets incorporated into all APC activities: institutional/project planning/program definition/funding
- every networking meeting: devote one additional day exclusively for women's issues
- proactive support for technical women involved in APC: training, "follow-up" to avoid attrition, encouragement, etc.
- build on existing APC Gender Policy
- Beijing platform: women and media section, lobbying for new strategic direction: equitable access, was successful; useful instrument to take to meetings/donors
- leadership skills/management training
- balance between experience and analysis: use each other to inform each other; relevance to each other - bridge between academic research and actual experience (between academic and action research)

## African Women's Networking Experience

### Marie-Helene Mottin-Sylla - ENDA

- got hooked during Beijing UN Women's meeting
- expressed interest in flow of communications resulting from Beijing meeting
- very few women interested in electronic communications in francophone - West Africa
- was isolated, intimidated by the technology, and discouraged by the lack of progress - found active solidarity within APC Women's Programme
- held a women's networking training workshop in Feb 1996 in Dakar (supported by APC/CABECA/WACC)
- training one women's organization in each francophone area so that they could be mother networks in their own countries
- result: network on women's health rights in francophone West Africa
- women not able to connect: need money, tech support, etc.
- WIDE helped to develop women's network: sent Marie-Helene to GreenNet for training; met with WACC and funded a women's networking support mission to Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo, Ivory Coast, Cameroun, successful so far (still in progress)
- APC Women's Programme offers support for identifying funders that are interested in women and technology
- technical support was readily available
- was happy to be able to connect with women (in the Programme) that are both interested in the technologies and in women's issues in general
- made allies with male technical staff, e.g., Moussa Fall, ENDA

### Mercy Wambui - EcoNews Africa

- found technical ally in Charles - he provides ongoing regular support
- was able to take advantage of technical training
- now able to set up issue-based networks of concern to women in the region

Regina Shakakata, ZARD

- made link to APC
- during UNWCW, set up ZARD to be an information point - got them to pick up messages from Beijing and circulate them to the media (Zambian Information Services), so coverage of the conference was excellent

## Appendices

List of Meeting Participants  
APC Africa Meeting Communique

### **\*\* List of Meeting Participants \*\***

Lishan Adam, UNECA/PADIS  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
lishan\_adam\_at\_uneca@un.org  
lisham@padis.gn.apc.org

Ronald Archer, International Development Research Centre  
Ottawa, Canada  
rarcher@idrc.ca

Karen Banks, GreenNet, APC Women's Programme  
London, England  
karenb@gn.apc.org

Salif Bengaly, Association Malienne pour le Recherche et le  
Developpement (AMRED "Institute Balanzan")  
Bamako, Mali  
sbengaly@balanzan.gn.apc.org

Dr. Fred Bukachi, Satellife (Healthnet Kenya)  
Nairobi, Kenya  
fbukachi@ken.healthnet.org

Jeff Cochrane, USAID/AfricaLink  
Washington D.C., USA  
africalink@usaid.gov  
cochrane@igc.apc.org

Peter K.A. Da Costa, InterPress Service (IPS)  
Harare, Zimbabwe  
ipspsc@harare.iafrica.com  
ipshre@harare.iafrica.com

Karin Delgadillo, APC Secretariat  
Quito, Ecuador  
karin@igc.apc.org

Anriette Esterhuysen, SANGONeT  
Johannesburg, South Africa  
anriette@sn.apc.org

Moussa Fall, ENDA Tiers Monde  
Dakar, Senegal  
moussaf@enda.sn

Edie Farwell, APC Secretariat  
San Francisco, US  
efarwell@igc.apc.org

Anna Feldman, One World Online  
Oxon, England  
hackney@wn.apc.org  
justice@oneworld.org

Nancy Hafkin, U.N. Economic Commission for Africa  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
hafkin.uneca@un.org

Magdi Ibrahim, ENDA-Maghreb  
Rabat-Souissi, Morocco  
magdi@endamag.gn.apc.org

Maureen James, Rapporteur  
Toronto, Canada  
maureen@web.net

Na'eem Jeenah, SANGONeT  
Johannesburg, South Africa  
naeem@sn.apc.org

Mike Jensen  
Johannesburg, South Africa  
mikej@wn.apc.org

Marietta Kailembo, Arusha Node Marie  
Arusha, Tanzania  
marietta@marie.gn.apc.org

Charley Lewis, NITF/COSATU  
Johannesburg, South Africa  
charley@cosatu.org.za

Penda Marcilly, ELCI  
Nairobi, Kenya  
pmarcilly@elci.sasa.unon.org

Chikweza Mbvundula, Epsilon & Omega Computer & Engineering Services  
Lilongwe, Malawi  
epsilon&omega@eo.wn.apc.org  
rcm@eo.wn.apc.org

Marie Helene Mottin-Sylla, ENDA Tiers Monde - SYNFEV  
Dakar, Senegal  
mhms@enda.sn

Charles Musisi, Mukla  
Kampala, Uganda  
cmusisi@mukla.ac.ug

Makau Ngola, ELCI Kenya  
Nairobi, Kenya

mngola@elci.sasa.unon.org

Ben Parker, UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs  
Nairobi, Kenya  
ben@dha.unon.org

Haymee Perez Cogle, EboNet  
Luanda, Angola  
haymee@ebonet.net

Alison Read, ZARD  
Lusaka, Zambia  
zard@zamnet.zm

Bernice Rowberg, World Vision  
Arusha, Tanzania  
bernice@marie.sasa.unon.org

Regina Cammy Shakakata, Zambia Association for Research & Development  
Lusaka, Zambia  
who@zamnet.zm

Jill Small, GreenNet  
London, England  
jsmall@gn.apc.org

Amalia Souza, APC Secretariat  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
apcadmin@ax.apc.org

Robert Valantin, International Development Research Centre  
Ottawa, Canada

Mercy Wambui, EcoNews Africa  
Nairobi, Kenya  
econews@webnet.net

Kate Wild  
IRDC - South Africa  
kwild@idrc.ca

## **\*\* APC Africa Meeting Communique \*\***

**THE HOLY FAMILY COMMUNIQUE from AFRICAN ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATORS**  
at the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Africa Strategy Meeting, Holy  
Family Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa, February 8-11 1997.

11 February 1997

*Many of us have worked in African networking from the early days and welcome the blooming of Internet access across the continent. But the network is not an end in itself. This technology has the potential to bring about dramatic social, political and economic change in Africa.*

*We work in a variety of roles in the progressive and non-profit sectors to support thousands of users in Africa with the connections and the information they need. We will continue to work together to pursue our vision of a network with a purpose. Our goals of low-cost, cooperative internetworking, quality local content, and the widest possible participation will remain even if*



*and when the current Internet mania dies away.*

*We have started work on a number of initiatives to address priority areas identified during the meeting and welcome partnerships in developing responses in four thematic areas: supporting electronic networks, promoting strategic use of information and communication technologies among partner communities, developing information content and tools, lobbying and advocacy.*

*A historic opportunity to develop technology for the good presents itself. However, without action on a number of issues, too many African people will be relegated to the role of passive spectator as the global information society takes off. As a grouping of interested parties under the aegis of the APC, we hope to raise awareness of these key problem areas:*

- ☐ *Relevant African information ("content") needs to be produced, managed and delivered appropriately within Africa. The raw information heritage is too valuable to be trusted to others. Almost no resources are directed to this need.*
- ☐ *Telephone and other communication infrastructure beyond the cities remains under-funded - a problem that liberalization cannot solve. Private investment in de-regulated markets has so far generally concentrated in the major cities.*
- ☐ *The little international investment that there is in technical training and capacity building - a critical need, especially to bring more women into networking - too often neglects the particular needs of Africa.*
- ☐ *Methods of information delivery must go beyond "putting it on the Web". The power and flexibility of electronic mail should not be under-estimated.*
- ☐ *Alliances are being developed between some donors and parastatal PTTs which are giving governments a stranglehold on national bandwidth. Donors are mainly focussing on the pipes, not the people.*
- ☐ *We seek greater consultation from the various initiatives which aim to steer telematics developments in Africa - including: AIF, ANI, AISI, AFCOM, SDNP, Acacia and the Leland Initiative. There is a difference between being used as cheap advisors and then ignored, and becoming valued as key stakeholders in an ongoing process.*

*We believe these concerns are shared by many in the African networking community, and unless they are addressed, the development of the African Information Society will be skewed and the prospect of greater marginalization will be increased.*

*Signed:*

*APC Secretariat Brazil, US, Ecuador <apcadmin@apc.org, efarwell@apc.org, karin@apc.org>, BalanzanNet, Mali <sbengaly@balanzan.gn.apc.org>, Ebonet, Angola, Haymee Perez Cogle <haymee@ebonet.net>, ECONeWS Africa <mwambui@tt.gn.apc.org>, ELCI, Kenya <mngola@elci.gn.apc.org>, ENDA, Maghreb <endamaghreb@endamag.gn.apc.org>, ENDA, Synfev <mhms@enda.sn>, ENDA, Tiers Monde <moussaf@enda.sn>, Epsilon and Omega, Malawi <rcmbvundula@eo.wn.apc.org>, Green Net, UK <karenb@gn.apc.org, jsmall@gn.apc.org>, HealthNet Africa <fbukachi@ken.healthnet.org>, IPS Africa <ipspsc@harare.iafrica.com>, MARIE, Tanzania <marietta@marie.gn.apc.org, bernice@marie.gn.apc.org>, Mukla, Uganda <cmusisi@mukla.ac.ug>, One World Online, Southern Partners Project <hackney@wn.apc.org>, PADIS/UNECA <lishan\_adam\_at\_uneca@un.org>, RIOD Africa <penda.marcilly@elci.gn.apc.org>, SANGOnet South Africa <naaem@wn.apc.org, anriette@wn.apc.org>, UN DHA/IRIN, Great Lakes <ben@dha.unon.org> Zambia Association for Research and Development <zard@zamnet.zm>, APC Grantwriter <maureen@web.net>.*

*Other enquiries or expressions of support can be sent to Na'eem Jeenah <naaem@wn.apc.org> and will be recorded in an updated version of this document. Na'eem can be reached on tel: +27 082 458 6536 until 12 February 1997.*

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## **APC Africa Strategy Development Meeting Report**

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