

## Editorial

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# Africa Launches Critical Information Society Strategy

Mobile subscribers in Africa have increased by over 1,000% between 1999 and 2003, according to a new ITU report. This may be an early achievement promoted by initiatives under the New Partnership for Africa's Development program, (NEPAD). Established in 2001 this pan-African organization recently formed the e-Africa Commission, opening its headquarters in Pretoria, South Africa. The purpose of the Commission is to put in motion the implementation of the ICT sector under the aegis of NEPAD.

The e-Africa Commission serves as the primary body on the development of an effective ICT Program in Africa to the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSIC) under NEPAD. At the Commission's inauguration, South African Telecom Minister Matsepe-Casaburri outlined that the program is a milestone "in our collective continental effort to bridge the digital divide in Africa and build an inclusive Information Society that is development oriented." The main sections of the report prepared by the Commission are the In-Focus feature of I-Ways, identifying important goals, actions and role of the Information Society. How to achieve these objectives, it is recognized, will require the region's "ample resources in terms of capital, human resources, know how and expertise." However, "this cannot be realized without effective cross-

utilization of these resources in an integrated context to complement the shortage in each country."

This report while necessarily comprehensive, is pragmatic and indeed reflects as much realism as possible. Roles of governments, civil society, the private sector, non-governmental bodies, and the international community are set forth. The details of these roles and the many responsibilities to implement regional ICT strategy are clearly presented. As well, the need to create an environment conducive to investment and innovation, foster regional cooperation and partnerships between the public and private sector, and improve awareness of the importance of ICT in all fields, are clearly demonstrated.

While Africa is a region representing more than 50 countries, actually it is joining many other developing countries that have designed and are implementing ICT strategies. Also in this issue the National Information Society Strategy of Ukraine is presented as well as references to initiatives in Bangladesh that are being emulated by a number of other countries. The central role of ICT in national development was recognized in presentations by Heads of State at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva.

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