

## DSF Regional Director for Africa Speaks at the European Forum on ICTs and Sustainable Development

European Forum on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Sustainable Development was organized by the Committee of Regions and Cities on 7 February 2007. The Forum was held in recognition of the need to establish a European platform of debate between information and communication technologies and sustainable development. The “aim of this platform is to specify and implement links as well as corresponding networks, either existing or to be created, in these areas”. The Committee of Regions considers necessary to “identify, in cooperation with public and private partners, the new strategic tools of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and their proper use in key aspects of sustainable development”. The Committee of Regions hopes that this platform will help all partners especially the Economic Forum initiated in France in 2005 to have better understanding of the stakes in the two fields. Thirty resource persons, including the Regional Director for Africa Global Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) were invited to make presentation on their institutions within the context of the theme of the Forum in the following broad areas to 117 audiences drawn from the EU:

- European Policies, ICT and sustainable development.
- ICT and sustainable development, for economic development.
- ICTs against climate change.
- Environmental impacts, energy use.
- Digital solidarities.
- Governance and empowerment.

The Regional Director for Africa of the Global Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) Mr. Ayuba Kadafa in his presentation observed that for the past twenty years, the world has been witnessing unprecedented global change driven by ICTs. The world is increasingly becoming inter-connected and actions in one part of the globe have direct consequences on even remote areas distant to them. People can transact businesses in several countries from their bedrooms. Children can take lessons in other countries from their houses and schools in their home countries. Women can receive trainings while, still looking after their children. Conflicts and acts of gross human right violations by undemocratic governments can be watched all over the world enabling the international community to quickly respond. The world becoming a global village has become a common terminology. It is clear that access to ICTs is unquestionably the gateway to sustainable development.



*Mr. Jean-François Soupizet, Director of International Relations, DG INFSO, EU Commission and  
Mr. Ayuba Kadafa, DSF Regional Director for Africa*

There are virtually no social, economic and political activities that are not today affected and driven by the ICTs. Until this era of change, transnational issues of common concern were caged in ideological warfare for supremacy. Globalization has however, made it possible for countries to cooperate more in tackling shared threats and exploit opportunities for human development. ICTs are indisputably the powerful engines for economic growth and development. They also encourage democratic practices, respect for law and order, transparency and accountability. The positive benefits do not however, come without price. The most worrisome is the trans-national crimes which are facilitated through the use of ICTs but even these cannot effectively be addressed without universal access to the ICTs.



*Mr. Ayuba Kadafa, DSF Regional Director for Africa*

4. The Regional Director observed that while ICTs are changing the lives of societies and communities more positively, the benefits are unevenly spread. The world is witnessing in the past 20 years a new inequality between the rich and the poor. The gap between the haves and the have nots of the digital era is increasing. This inequality dangerously aggravates the old divides between peoples of the world. To be poor in this era simply means to be denied the right of access to knowledge and the latest advances of humanity. It is a big challenge that at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century in an increasingly globalized economy, more than

80% of the world population does not have access to information and communication technologies. Today for example, more than 75% of world's internet users live in the developed countries that make-up less than 15% of the world's population. He observed that the world was witnessing a new wave of migration of the youths from info-poor to info-rich countries, in search of opportunities. All the info-rich countries are trying to find ways of reducing these phenomena but the youths in info-poor are also perfecting new ways of overcoming the migration hurdles. **The best solution is probably to create opportunities for the youths in their own communities. Make their communities attractive to live, study, play and work. The magic answer to this problem is providing access to ICTs as these will alter their communities.**

The Regional Director reported to have visited several schools in rural communities. The story out of these communities is pathetic. He had showed a manual typewriter to some school boys and girls, who had not seen it before. On knowing its function, each of them wanted to be given an opportunity to use it, even for a minute. He then wondered how the international community expects such children to compete in the globalize economy with children that have access to ICTs. He asked the Forum to take concrete actions that can ensure that all children no matter where they go to school have access to ICTs. This will require a lot of sacrifice on the part of those that have.

The efforts to bridge the digital divide and to promote the good use of information and communication technologies for development are essential aspects of the fight against poverty. The least developed and developing countries are disadvantaged in the emerging Information Society. Africa however, is the most disadvantaged region of the world and the current development assistance programmes given to the continent are inadequate to address even the traditional challenges to development.

In order to turn the digital divide into digital opportunities and solidarity, the African Union through H.E. President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal proposed the creation of the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) which was approved at the Geneva Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003. The Regional Director reported that the DSF now has 23 Founding Members.



*European Forum on ICTs and Sustainable Development*

The DSF strives to bridge the digital divide and promotes an inclusive knowledge-based society for all. By facilitating access to ICTs, the Fund contributes to sustainable development of the marginalized and rural communities. To achieve its goal, the DSF work closely and collaborate with all stakeholders- national and local authorities, private sector entities, international and non-governmental organizations and the civil society.

The DSF provides support to community-based development projects using ICTs like radio, telephone, television, internet etc. Funds are allocated to implement local initiatives that addresses the needs of local populations, tailored to field realities and respectful of local knowledge and culture. Priority is given to proposals from women organizations because they are the main providers of food, education and health care. The DSF supports projects in three main areas of activity:

- Education, professional training and health.
- ICT support services to local administrations.
- The creation of new activities, new employment, new revenue and new markets.

The DSF mobilizes resources for its projects and activities through the generous contributions and donations of members. The challenges of digital divide are enormous but the resources to address them are limited. Even if all member states of the United Nations join the Fund, their normal contributions to join the DSF would not be adequate to address all the challenges of the digital divide. The Fund needs sustainable means of funding is activities and projects. The DSF therefore developed an innovative financing mechanism which places information technologies at the service of development. This is the 1% digital solidarity principle. It is a voluntary commitment which public authorities, businesses and other stakeholders can adopt, entailing a one percent digital solidarity contribution on public ICT procurement contracts, by vendors from their profit margin. This contribution is neither a donation nor taxation but an investment in future markets.

The funds collected are used to finance community-based projects in rural areas to address insolvent demands in order to create new market, new activities, new employment and new revenue.

Those who make the contribution receive "Digital Solidarity" label. For the public stakeholders the incentives for adopting the one percent Digital Solidarity Principle are:

- It will ensure equal opportunities in solidarity-based information society.
- Strengthens cooperation between public authorities in the North and South.
- It will encourage private companies to invest in new markets of the South
- It would facilitate access to free and pluralistic information.

He asked what the Forum can do to help the marginalized communities to become part of the emerging Information Society. The Regional Director said the Forum can play constructive and positive role. He urged all participants at the Forum to understand that the marginalized communities are part of humanity and they have the right to decent living which can only be achieved where there are opportunities. **He challenged the Forum imagine the markets that would be created, if all communities in the world have access to ICTs. It will not only bring sustainable development to the marginalized but ICT industries in the north will witness unprecedented returns on their investments.** He therefore strongly recommended that the forum recognizes and accepts that providing access to all communities through solidarity-based approach will bring sustainable development and eradicate poverty. He urged participants at the Forum to work with the DSF to achieve this noble objective. The European Forum can also add its voice to the initiative by adopting the 1% Principle.

The Regional Director concluded with a word of caution that the consequences of continued exclusion and marginalization of a large proportion of humanity in the emerging Information Society would be too grave and more costly than their inclusion. He therefore appealed to the Forum to join hands with the DSF to provide opportunities for sustainable development in the least developed and the developing societies by accepting to implement the 1% Digital Solidarity Principle.

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