

**REPORT ON THE  
2010 EURO-AFRICA WEEK ON ICT RESEARCH AND E-INFRASTRUCTURES  
HELD AT  
THE SCANDIC MARINA CONGRESS CENTRE, HELSINKI, FINLAND.  
DECEMBER 7-10, 2010**

**by  
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This voluntary report is a summary of my observations and the outcome of a meeting of Nigerians that participated in the Euro-Africa week in Helsinki. My attendance was influenced by the year I spent as a programme officer in the Nigeria ICT Forum of Partnership Institutions, Abuja and the exposure to efforts seeking to establish the Nigerian Research and Education Network. I found the activities of the week very enlightening and I hope to share some of what I have learned to foster these efforts even if indirectly.

I am currently finishing my Masters thesis in International Business at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Internationales (HEI-HEP) Paris and look to continue developing my interest in Internet and Communications Management.

## **REPORT**

In 2005, an EU strategy for Africa was developed to help Africa meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. In 2007, the African Union and European Union entered into agreement to provide a framework for AU-EU relations and formed a partnership for the mutual benefit of both continents.

There have been several activities under this framework targeted at meeting the set goals such as; the Euro-Africa ICT activities during the ICT 2010 event which was held at Brussels from September 27th – 29th, 2010. It had a focus on supporting Africa-EU research collaboration. The 3rd Africa-EU Summit held on 29th – 30th November, 2010 in Tripoli, Libya has so far been the most important political event concerning the Africa-EU framework as this brought together heads of states and government to address key issues. As one of many context specific side events, the 3rd Euro-Africa week on ICT research and e-Infrastructures was held in Helsinki, Finland from 7th-10th December 2010.

Africa has recognized that science and technology and ICT are key vectors for bridging the scientific and digital divides, for reducing poverty and ensuring socio-economic development, for reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and, eventually, for supporting the sustainable evolution of Africa. The African Union Commission and the European Commission are therefore working closely together to achieve this goal. One area that has been identified is Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education with research and education networks as a mechanism for actualizing the objectives.

A Research and Education Network (REN) is primarily a human network and accompanying organizational and physical structures for producing and sharing knowledge and for promoting a continuous research agenda. A REN therefore is a specialized internet service provider dedicated to supporting the needs of the research and education community.

These networks are organized in a hierarchy with campus networks as the basic building blocks. Different campus networks come together to form a Research and Education Network (REN). When this is within national borders, it is referred to as a National Research and Education Network (NREN). The NREN is responsible on the national basis for the provision of data communications networks and services to the research and education community of its country. NRENs greatly increase communications between researchers in a country and a region; it also provides access to ICT tools for students which are absolutely necessary and often cannot be acquired by individual institutions. An example of an NREN in West Africa is the Ghanaian Research and Education Network (**GARNET**). The next level of the hierarchy is the Regional Research and Education Network (RREN). This is a network of NRENs in a region such as the West and Central African Research Education Network (**WACREN**), **UbuntuNet Alliance** for East and South Africa and **GÉANT** which is the RREN for Europe. This level of research and education networking serves to provide interconnectivity for the NRENs in its region and global connections to researchers in similar regional networks.

The UbuntuNet Alliance until recently has been the only regional network in Africa with 10 countries in the East and South of Africa as members. They are the partners in the EU-AU AfricaConnect project which aims to establish a high-capacity internet network for research and education in Southern and Eastern Africa, to provide the region with a gateway to global research collaboration.

In West and Central Africa, the universities have still not been able to mobilize themselves to form NRENs but the West and Central African Research and Education Network (WACREN) was incorporated earlier this year in August 2010. Only Ghana (GARNET) currently has an NREN in this region but there are ongoing talks in Nigeria, Senegal, Cameroon and Niger to form NRENs. Trust among institutions, ICT policies and commitment of financial support at the national level are some of the common problems standing in the way of these NRENs being formed.

Nigeria was well represented at this conference with about 18 participants in attendance (see appendix) but one thing was obvious, Nigeria was not involved in most of the activities and there were hardly any presentations out of the many on Nigeria. So much was talked about and most of the funders and people who worked in Africa had their focus on East and South Africa. The major reason being that Nigeria does not have a research and education network.

There have been many efforts to establish a Nigerian NREN in many projects: NUMIS, NUNeT, PolyNet, TeachNet, NEARNet, elf Net, NULP, VLC, in an effort to develop and use ICT to foster institutional collaboration among and between administrative and academic communities. It seems there is a lack of connection between the promoters and the community so they are not able to organize and coordinate activities to get the NREN formed. Many institutions are not aware of these efforts and there is insufficient activity at this primary level. There are also other issues militating against the formation of the Nigerian NREN and there is a need for policy makers to be engaged for resolution.

On the other hand, there has been some progress with a different form of research and education networking with clusters being formed in different regions. An example is **Eko-Konnect** which is a network of the higher education and research institutions in Lagos. In the North West zone, Sokoto, Zamfara and Kebbi States are in the process of forming another cluster. There are also ongoing discussions in Ibadan, Oyo State driven by the University of Ibadan to form another cluster around the South West zone. These clusters can be eventually connected to each other to form the Nigerian NREN. An example of this type of collaboration of networks is NorduNet which comprises of NRENs of 5 small countries in Europe (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway) as a single Nordic network with one voice leading to more effective regional and global participation in research and education networking.

Considering the size and diversity of Nigeria, this clustering approach appears more likely to be successful with the different communities and institutions collaborating locally with the knowledge to surmount the challenges in their immediate localities.

The Nigerians who attended the conference held a meeting to see how they could assist in creating more of the awareness needed in their institutions.

The action points from the meeting were:

- Go back and create an awareness of the importance of the NREN in the various institutions that were represented
- Interest other institutions in the area to form a cluster where one does not exist or join existing activity
- Participants from National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure Nigeria (NASeni) and National Space Research and Development Agency Nigeria (NASRDA) would sensitize their management on the efforts in Nigeria to create an NREN and work closer with the institutions
- The participants from the University of Ibadan are to connect with ongoing efforts and work closer with Eko- Konnect

From my observations, it is logical to assume that any strategy must involve campus network administrators and the researchers actively to be effective.

Links –

Eko-Konnect - <http://www.eko-konnect.org.ng>

WACREN - <http://www.wacren.net>

UbuntuNet Alliance - <http://www.ubuntunet.net/>

Euro-Africa ICT - <http://euroafrica-ict.org/>

AfricaConnect - <http://www.africaconnect.eu>

NORDUnet - <http://www.nordu.net/ndnweb/home.html>

GARNET - <http://garnet.edu.gh/>

## APPENDIX

### LIST OF NIGERIAN PARTICIPANTS AT THE 2010 EURO-AFRICA WEEK HELSINKI, FINLAND

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Institution/Organisation</b>
Dapo Adeniyi	Male	National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASENI)
Olawale Olaniyan Isaac Adebayo	Male	National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASENI)
Ore Sunday	Male	University of Lagos, Nigeria
Akinseloyin MacDonald	Male	University of Lagos, Nigeria
Oguike	Male	Guison Consulting, Finland
Omo Oaiya	Male	West and Central Africa Research and Education Network (WACREN)
Bolanle Ojokoh	Female	Federal University of Technology, Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria
Ikotun Abiodun	Female	Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, Nigeria
Veronica Mejabi	Female	University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria
Babatunji Wusu	Male	The Premier News Lagos, Nigeria
Kunle Adejumo	Male	Multilinks Telecommunications, Ondo State, Nigeria
Dauda Duncan	Male	National Space Research and Development Agency, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria
Olalekan Oladepo	Male	University of Lappeenranta, Finland
Olufade Onifade	Male	University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria
Rising Osazuwa	Male	University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria
Ego Obi	Female	Google-Ghana (Sub-Saharan Africa)
Abiodun Jagun	Female	LINK Centre, Graduate school of Public & Development Management, South Africa
Ene Abah	Female	Ecole des Hautes Etudes Internationales, Paris, France (HEI-HEP)