

**The Markle Foundation  
& The International Institute for Information Technology (INIIT)**

**Round Table Meeting on**

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**Broadening and Enhancing the Capacity of Developing Countries  
to Effectively Participate in the Global ICT Policy and  
Decision Making Fora**

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**La Palm Royal, Hotel, Accra Ghana**

**13<sup>th</sup> March 2002**

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**Report of the Proceedings of the Meeting**

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## **The Opening**

The Round Table Meeting on Broadening and Enhancing Africa's Capacity to Effectively Participate in the Global ICT Policy and Decision Making Fora which took place in Accra, Ghana on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2002 during the ICANN meeting was organized by the International Institute for Information Technology (INIIT). The meeting, a Markle Foundation project was sponsored by the Markle.

The meeting was chaired by Dr. Nii Narku Quaynor, Chairman and CEO of Network Computer Systems (NCS) and Senior Research Fellow of INIIT. The meeting was attended by 24 participants from 14 different countries. Also attending the meeting was Mr. Stefaan Verhulst representing Markle Foundation and Mr. Don MacLean of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization (CTO).

Dr Quaynor in his opening noted that Africa's participation in international ICT policy and decision making fora is of great importance and hence the need to bring together all African country representatives attending the ICANN meeting in Accra to participate in the Round Table meeting on how promote and facilitate Africa's participation in global fora. He noted that an effective level of participation in these fora is necessary for promoting and accelerating Africa's development through the use and implementation of ICTs. In his view, participation in international meetings such as ICANN is important since it leads to a better understanding of issues involved and raises the desire to participate more in the future.

In response Mr. Stefaan Verhulst, underscored the fact that not many developing countries including those from Africa do often have the opportunity to participate in international fora of relevance to their developmental efforts. He noted that the Markle Foundation is committed to bridging the digital divide that exists between the North and the South. Mr. Verhulst pointed out that it is ironic that those most affected by the pitfalls of this digital divide participate the least in the decision making process. Indeed, for these countries to participate in a more meaningful way they need to understand the global issues involve especially at policy level. He observed that the Round Table meeting was of particular importance since it was aimed at setting a framework on which the issues involved could be discussed.

Don MacLean of CTO also responding noted that CTO has also been commissioned to examine ways that developing countries can be facilitated to effectively participate in the global fora. He applauded the objectives of the Round Table meeting and in particular Markle's efforts in commissioning INIIT to prepare a concept paper on an issue of relevance to CTO study on behalf of DOT Force.

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## **The Presentation of the Concept Paper**

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Professor Clement Dzidonu, a Senior Research Fellow of INIIT presented a paper commissioned by Markle on 'Broadening and Enhancing the Capacity of Developing Countries to Effectively Participate in the Global ICT Policy Fora and the ICT for Development (ICT/Dev) Process'. Professor Dzidonu his presentation made the following key observations:

(i) The digital divide and its impact on the socio-economic developmental outcomes of developing countries has in the last couple of years been a key development agenda at major international fora.

The deployment, exploitation and the development of ICTs to support the process of transforming developing countries and move them towards information and knowledge economy is the central question which needs to be address within the context of the digital divide.

(ii) The DOT Force and the UN-ICT Task Force as well as the Markle Foundation (who is a member of both the DOT Force and the UN-ICT Task Force) identified the need to establish and support universal participation in addressing new international policy and technical issues raised by the Internet and ICTs.

(iii) The concept of universal participation based on the notion of *representational universal participation* can be achieved in situation where: *a substantial number of the qualified participating entities who are willing and available to participate in the event and likely to be affected by the outcome of the event and/or benefit from the event are fairly represented at the event.*

(iv) Some of the key global ICT policy and decision making issues can be identified as: (i) WTO negotiations and agreements; for example, those relating telecommunication services and universal service; (ii) issues relating to accounting rate regimes; (iii) intellectual property rights issues, (iv) the participation of developing countries in Internet Governance and the ICANN process; and (v) issues relating ITU standards and international telecommunications regulatory policies and so on.

(v) The key stakeholders and players in the global ICT policy and decision making fora can be identified as: ICANN, World Trade Organization (WTO), Internet Society (ISOC), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), United Nations General Assembly (UN-GA), Africa Development Forum (ADF), Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), World Economic Forum (WEF) and others like the UN-ICT Task Force (UN-ICT-TF) and the Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force).

(vi) The key challenges that developing countries including African countries are facing that inhibits their effective participation and influence in the global ICT policy and decision making fora are::

- The limited bargaining power and leverage of developing countries as compared to other countries and regional blocs;
- The absence of coherent, consistent position by developing countries on major global issues, that do not just react to events but anticipate issues well in advance of their explicit emergence;
- The lack of experience and capacity in the global ICT policy area, and the ‘brain-drain’ of many of the most qualified;
- The absence of effective cooperation amongst developing countries on how to engage in collective negotiation on global policy issues for their mutual benefit and
- The effect of some of the extra-regional block alliances that for example some Africa countries enter into --- which in some cases makes it difficult for African countries to act as a group to present a common front on issues at global fora

(vii) The four main types of barriers to effective participation by developing countries in the global ICT policy and decision making fora are: Technical Barriers, Informational Barriers, Financial Barriers, and Institutional Barriers.

(viii) The presentation also classified *participation* in a given fora in terms of possible levels of participation including: Full Effective Participation (FEP), Partially Effective Participation (PEP), Non-Effective Participation (NEP), Present-But-No-Participation (PNP), Could-Participate- but- Cannot Attend (CCA), Could-not-Attend-Cannot Participate (CCP).

(viii) The presentation apart from analyzing the nature and level of participation for a given situation also pointed out the need to examine the *footprints* (or the impacts) made by virtue of effective participation in the event. Applying the FootPrint™ concept pioneered by INIIT the presentation analyze the various levels of footprints (impacts) that could result from participating in a given global fora. This include analysing the: Individual Level FootPrint, Organizational Level FootPrint, National Level FootPrint, Continental Level FootPrint, Combined Level FootPrint, and No-FootPrint Participation.

Professor Dzionu pointed out that efforts to facilitate and enhance the effective participation of developing countries including those Africa in the global ICT policy scene can be directed at two levels:

(i) efforts aimed at addressing the four barriers to participation namely: technical, informational, financial and institutional barriers and

(ii) efforts aimed at ensuring that the participation of developing countries does have the likelihood to yield results on the ground to facilitate their development in the face of globalization and the emerging information age to be dominated by information and knowledge based economies and societies.

He noted that there is a need to take steps to address all the four types of barriers to participation; and that addressing some without the others will not guarantee *effective participation*.

Professor Dzionu also pointed out that efforts directed at tackling the barriers to the effective participation of developing countries in the global ICT policy and decision making fora should be a shared one. He noted that although external funding agencies could assist in addressing some of the *financial barriers* to participation and to some extent some aspects of the *technical barriers* by funding technical assistance and training programmes, the bulk of the responsibility to address the barriers to entry lies with the developing countries themselves.

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## **The Round Table Discussion**

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There was a round table discussion of the presentation and each participant made a number of observations and contributions including suggestions of how to move the process forward. Below is a summary of the main points made by the participants during the discussion session.

(i) One of the participants gave ICANN meetings as an example of global ICT fora in which Africans cannot participate effectively since one requires a considerable amount of financial resources to frequently attend these quarterly meetings which rotates from continent to continent. Most potential ICANN meeting participants from Africa therefore face major financial barriers to effective participation. A point was made to the effect that funding for participation in some of the major

international ICT fora is largely supported to some extent by outside agencies and donors and not governments.

(ii) A participant observed that the presentation and the accompanied concept paper raises a number of issues that affect individuals as potential participants to global ICT policy and decision making fora yet individuals do not control or have influence in this areas at the national level. A point was made to the effect that: the concept paper and the presentation summarizes some of the key issues bedeviling African countries in their efforts to broaden and enhance their effective participation in the global ICT policy and decision making fora.

(iii) It was noted that: in most cases information relating to global ICT policy and decision making events are not disseminated in good time to allow potential participants from Africa and other developing countries to explore the possibility of attending. There is therefore an *informational barrier* to participation as identified by the presentation. Efforts to broaden and enhance the effective participation of developing countries in the global ICT fora should in effect take on board how to address this type of barriers to participation.

(iv) Sponsorship to attend and participate in international policy making events was singled out during the discussion as a problem area which needs to be addressed. Most of the participants at the Round Table meeting were attending ICANN meeting for the first time and a number of them were sponsored by various agencies including CTO, World Bank (InfoDev Program), Markle Foundation (through the Salzburg Seminar Project), Francophonie among others. A point was made to the effect that, without these types of sponsorships on a continuous basis, the majority of potential participants from developing countries to these global fora will not be possible.

(v) A point was made to the effect that, a number of the international global ICT fora are of technical nature and one requires a number of attendances at these meetings to be able to appreciate, and understand the core issues involve and effectively make meaningful contributions. Citing ICANN and WTO meetings as examples, one participant observed that issues become more clearer after participating in a couple of these meetings over a period of time.

(vi) Some participants are of the view that some of the global fora require a lot of investment in time by the individual participants, there is a need to put in place mechanisms at local/national level whereby information gathered at these meetings be widely disseminated to those who are likely to be effected by the decisions taken at these meetings but were unable to attend. This the meeting noted is one way of ensuring the multiplier effect (impact) of the outcomes of these global fora at the organizational, national or continental level.

(vii) A point was also made to the effect that the barriers to participation noted during the presentation are internal and external. Internal barriers are to do with those limitations resulting from individual countries' inabilities to effectively participate while external barriers are to do with the fact that larger economies tend to exercise some form of dominance. There is the need to involve as many players as possible and shun tendencies to isolate problems but rather see the bigger picture.

(viii) Some of the participants were of the view that the majority of developing countries tend to favour and encourage government participants in global policy and decision making fora and as a result the private sector and the civil society organizations who are active on issues being discussed at some of these fora do not get the chance to participate and make contributions. It was noted that weary bureaucracy in governments can also be an obstacle to effective participation of developing

countries in the global ICT fora and that some governments sometimes send representatives to some of these meetings who do not understand the issues involved --- This some argued can be regarded as a major barrier to effective participation in some of the technical meetings like those of ITU, ICANN, WTO, WIPO among others.

(xi) One of the participants was of the view that some of the issues raised by the presentation and the concept paper requires that one should have a good understanding of the underlying issues of some of these global ICT policy and decision making fora as a necessary requirement for facilitating effective participation in these fora by participants from developing countries including those of Africa.

(xii) It was noted that ICTs may not be a priority area for resource allocation at national level in some developing countries since most governments in these countries are still reeling with basic issues such provision of food, shelter and health. Questions on whether ICT is pro-poor still abound. Some participants pointed out that doubt about the relevance of ICTs to facilitate the socio-economic development process of developing countries can sometimes influence their level of commitment to participate effectively in the international ICT policy and decision making fora.

(xiii) Some participants lamented that the impact of the limited number of participants from developing countries who managed to attend some of these global fora is sometimes reduced as a result of the simultaneous scheduling of a number of crucial parallel panel sessions. This they pointed out shut out participation and further limits and undermine the effectiveness of the participation of those from developing countries, since in most cases their numbers are few at these meetings

(xiv) The point was also made that a lot of experience is gained by participating in some of these global fora and that there is therefore a need to broaden the participation of developing countries by putting efforts into increasing their numbers at these meetings and making it a point to attract the best from all the regions including from the developing countries.

(xv) One of the participants was of the view that: the nature of these meetings seems to favour effective communication skills and confidence. There is therefore a great need for participants to build up their confidence to participate during these meetings. Effective participation is not possible without having the confidence to participate and contribute to the deliberations of the meeting. In some cases overcoming the technical barriers to participate can help in building up confidence to effectively participate in these fora and meetings

(xvi) The question of collaboration between the government and the private sector in developing countries to facilitate the process of broadening and enhancing the participation of these countries in the global ICT policy and decision making fora was raised. There is a need to put in place structures and mechanisms to facilitate and reflect African needs within the global fora. Such structures some argued can also help in facilitating the sharing of information and keeping each other informed on the outcomes and relevance of these global fora.

(xvii) A point was also made to the effect that there is a need to take stock of what have been gained from past meetings from the point of view of developing countries including those from Africa.

(xviii) A number of the participants also raised the issue of the need to take into account linguistic and regional representation issues within the context of addressing issues relating to broadening and enhancing the effective participation of developing countries in global fora. A key point was made to

the effect that language can sometimes be a barrier to participation at some of the international fora where the issue of simultaneous translation of conference proceedings are not taken on board.

(xix) One participant noted that some participants from developing countries do sometimes have problem expressing themselves at some of these global meetings since the languages used are at some of these meetings are not necessary their first language.

(xx) The meeting concurred that: ICTs can contribute positively to national development. Governments need to take advantage of the goodwill created by the civil society, entrepreneurs and private sector and develop ICT policies that will boost community development. There is therefore a need to Integrate ICT into the National Agenda and relate ICT policies with Socio-economic development.

(xxi) Some of the participants were of the view that: there is a need to put more emphasis on information dissemination strategies so that we can have tailored information for various groups. For instance information for the government will be different from that given to the rural folk even though the ideas being expressed are the same. Thus knowing the target group is important since interests may be different.

(xxii) A view was expressed to the effect that ICT matters are not well understood and appreciated by most developing countries and hence the inadequate level of investment and participation in some of the key global ICT policy and decision making fora.

(xxiii) The meeting noted that: for effective participation to take place the role of governments to support and facilitate the process may be necessary and this need to be recognized and taken on board. The view is that: governments in most developing countries are major stakeholders in a number of areas and on a number of social, economic and political issues which are of relevance to the ICT for development process in these countries

(xxiv) It was noted that it is very important for the private sector to take a leading role in participating in international meetings such as ICANN, WTO and others. A point was made to the effect that the telecommunication sector in developing countries is quite nominal in their participation in the global ICT fora because of lack of enough background research on conferences.

(xxv) A point was made to the effect that for African countries to make lasting footprints in the global ICT policy and decision making arena, there is the need to consistently send knowledgeable people who will be capable understanding the deliberations of these meetings and make useful contributions. The need to take steps to overcome some of the technical barriers to effective participation of developing countries in the global ICT fora is therefore paramount

(xxvi) The need for developing countries as a whole or a section of them to take common positions on major issues at the global ICT policy and decision making fora was emphasized.

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### **Some Conclusions and Recommendations in Relation to the Next Steps.**

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(i) The Round Table meeting recommended that African countries need to play an active role in the global ICT policy and decision making fora. The need to ensure adequate and proportional level of representation at these meetings was emphasize by the participants.

(ii) A recommendation was made to the effect that there is a need to put in place a system of documenting information from conferences and build capacity to sustain consistency in attendance and effective participation in relevant global fora..

(iii) Another key recommendation is that there is a need for the participants of the Round Table meeting to follow up on the issues discussed. A number of suggestions were made in relation to how to the best forum or mechanism for taking the process forward. --- Some suggestions include: setting up a list to facilitate a further discussion online on the subject matter: setting up national focal groups or points at the national level to take up issues relating to how best to facilitate and ensure effective participation in the global ICT fora. It was suggested that participants to the Round Table meeting could serve as the starting point for setting up these local focal groups.

(iv) The proposal to host an international conference sometime this year to provide a wider forum for discussing the issues raised at the Round Table meeting was endorsed by the participants. The details of this proposed conference is presented in the Annex

*The Round Table Meeting Resolve that:*

- The discussions be extended to an online forum by creating a list
- Need to focus on the way forward by creating focus groups in various countries.
- Need to devise or organize in some cases pre-fora meetings or consultation process to establish a common position of issues of mutual concern.
- Need to organize a conference sometime this year to deliberate on the issues raised a a wider forum.