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Integration of Information and Communication Technologies into the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, and National Planning Framework and Systems – The first steps

A process coordinated by the National Planning Authority

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can play an important role in development. In the recent past it has been shown that ICTs are key tools that can be used to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Projects in Health, Education, Governance and other sectors have proven to work when the right conditions are created and the right technologies used. In Uganda it was realised that the national planning document, the Poverty Eradication Action Plan, didn't reflect ICTs even though key stakeholders stress its importance. It is against this background that the National Planning Authority (NPA) in collaboration with the Inter Agency ICT/eGovernance taskforce it decided to take action.

From the 22nd to the 24th of November 2005 key stakeholders from across government institutions deliberated on the issue of integrating ICTs into the PEAP using a Round Table methodology facilitated by the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD). The workshop was held in Ridar Hotel in Mukono hosted by the NPA.

“... [The issues] in this workshop are matters of crucial importance to National development, as well as socio-economic transformation, especially as we strive to pursue the vision of transforming our nation into a modern, industrialised and knowledge based society.” was the key message of the NPA Chairman Dr. Frank Mabiriizi, herewith setting the scene for the discussions.

NPA there after made the participants aware of the movements in the field, a Ministry of ICT will shortly be formed which makes the issue of integration even more relevant. To highlight the view of many of the development partners an exemplary presentation was made by the European Commission, again stressing the importance of reflecting ICTs in the National priorities and plans.

Using the theme “poverty eradication in the district using ICTs” the workshop started its discussions. An inventory identified two issues ranked very highly as environment factors: a conducive economic environment and political economy. Using these two as axis, four scenarios were made by participants to illustrate these essential issues. The scenario of NAKAPIRIPIRITI illustrated the ideal situation, a district with e-voting,

promotion of the district via the website to tourists, efficient (mobile) phone services, digital TV and transparency of Government through the use of ICT. This scenario became the vision for all which was used for 2nd day. In addition leverage areas for poverty eradication to which ICTs can contribute were ranked with policy and regulation and strategies, funding and infrastructure ranking very highly.

Day two of the workshop used the inputs of day one relating them to the participants own sectors and the Poverty Eradication Action plan. The workshop divided into the five pillars of the PEAP and discussed the way in which ICT can assist in achieving the objectives of these pillars. An elaborate list of possible actions per pillar came out with the recognition that not all stakeholders were present and that the activities identified are only a first inventory.

All participants under scribed the findings and committed to taking the actions they can influence forward in their own organisations. After lunch, the discussion continued identifying further mechanisms on how to harbour the overarching issues and make sure that ICT integration keeps moving forward.

One participant noted:

"We are at the threshold of seeing ICT move forward in this country, The president announced the Ministry for ICT on National television yesterday and there is a lot of energy with the participants of this workshop. We will see big change if we keep working together and maintain our focus!"

It was decided to continue with collaborative efforts and to try to get other line Ministries on board, working together on the Development of Uganda in the most effective and efficient way, using ICTs. A team was formed to safeguard and pull this process.

This workshop is only a step in a bigger process of integration, the NPA in partnership with I-Network Uganda and IICD. FIT Uganda Ltd researched the ICT environment and its relation with PEAP and drafted the reference report that was used as a baseline in the discussion in the workshop.

Next steps

Following this positive start NPA will continue to sensitise people, amongst which the Permanent Secretaries of all Ministries as well as the development partners. The Chairman and Executive director of NPA, will own the outcomes of the workshop.