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**The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Ethiopian Telecommunication Agency**

Ethiopia's Response to Draft WSIS Declaration of Principles and Action Plans

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Executive Summary

The challenges of globalization necessitate that countries develop their information and communication infrastructure and create an enabling environment for information and knowledge sharing. To this effect, the WSIS process provides African countries with opportunities to embark on nation-wide awareness raising programmes on the information society development issues and take concrete measures that would facilitate their digital inclusion. As part of its contribution to the WSIS process, Ethiopia, like most developing countries, is in the process of implementing various ICT projects and initiatives. Progress in this front prerequisites that the country aligns its endeavors with similar regional and global initiatives such as the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), the Bamako 2002 Declaration and the ICT component of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In response to the WSIS principles and plan of action, the following are Ethiopia's positions:

- As a country with over 67 million people, teledensity of 0.5 (2002), and PCs penetration of below 80,000 (2001), **ICTs infrastructure** is one of the key areas that Ethiopia must build up with a mix of technologies ranging from gigabit fiber backbone network to wireless solutions that speed up the penetration of ICTs to the grass root or rural community level. District centred development is the current approach to accelerate the empowerment of the society's participation in and addressing of community based development requirements. In fact, infrastructure is the basis to the expansion of all the other ICT services and products, and for implementing the actions enumerated below. Hence, the issue of financing and investment, affordability, development and sustainability of ICTs infrastructure is of critical concern to Ethiopia that requires financial and technical support from the international community to ensure Ethiopia's full participation in the information society.
- Ethiopia recognizes that **capacity building** is the cornerstone for the development of an information society. In this connection, a national ICT capacity building programme has been developed and efforts are underway to implement various projects in the framework of the programme that addresses development of human resource, building institutional and technological capacity. Given the amount of resources needed to meet these challenges, it is imperative that the country forges strong partnership with the private sector and international donor agencies.
- Ethiopia is a country with diverse **cultural and linguistic heritage**. There are over eighty local languages. Moreover, Ethiopia has its own script used for written communication for a number of centuries. The multilingualism and the development of the local script present challenges with respect to Ethiopia's full participation in the information society, especially in terms of development and promotion of local content. Although there are endeavors to develop an Ethiopic characters. The work done so far is far from being desired. In this regard, the country needs a great deal of resource and technical assistance in using its languages for developing local content including digitizing indigenous knowledge and enable local languages fully supported by all ICT products and services including internet domain names. Furthermore, local research efforts targeted at the development of local language processing need to be supported.

- Ethiopia fully recognizes the significant role that ICTs play in harnessing socio-economic development and its contribution in poverty reduction and alleviation. The national ICT capacity building programme provides emphasis to selected focus areas to ***promote development-oriented applications*** in education, health, governance, trade and commerce, and public administration and service delivery. In addition, local ICT companies should be encouraged to engage themselves in the development of applications to maintain sustainability and cost-effectiveness. Export-oriented ICT products and services such as outsourcing software development projects from companies in developed countries to companies in developing countries should be encouraged and supported. Furthermore, ICT manufacturing capabilities should be encouraged through providing support to local IT companies involved in innovative activities, promoting the concept of setting up IT parks in capital cities and regional towns, supporting school IT clubs and research networks, and introducing preferential incentive schemes to encourage IT investment in the underprivileged areas.
- Information is the basis of a well-functioning and transparent decision-making process and a pre-requisite for a well established democracy. Knowledge is the key agent for transforming both our global society and local communities. Sharing and strengthening global knowledge for development can be enhanced by ensuring **equitable access to information** for educational, scientific, economic, social, political and cultural activities, leading to a vibrant public domain of information. Considering the cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly in African countries, emphasis should be given to preserving and making accessible indigenous knowledge. Governments should strive to remove barriers to equitable access to information and knowledge that result from differences in education and literacy levels, gender, age, income and connectivity.
- Ethiopia recognizes that ***security in the use of ICTs*** is a major factor for the development of the information society. As the cyber world does not respect national frontiers, it is impossible to fight cyber crime without international cooperation. Building a secure ICT environment on which users can have confidence to exchange all kind of information is of paramount importance. In particular, supporting developing countries in creating awareness and fighting cyber crimes is an important component for ensuring security in the cyber world. Otherwise, cyber crime paradises may be created in these countries endangering the information society development. Governments of the third world should be supported in promoting the legal ICT market so that ICT professionals are not attracted by cyber crime activities. In addition, appropriate mechanisms should be put in place that enable developing countries adopt powerful ICT security technologies produced in developed countries.
- Information society development needs the full ***participation of all stakeholders*** at national, regional and international level. This can only be achieved through encouraging cooperation and partnership and the full and effective involvement of all stakeholders, and by clearly defining their roles, responsibilities and goals. Considering the limited financial and technical resources for information society development, resource mobilization should be the collective responsibilities of all stakeholders at national, regional, and international levels.

- Ethiopia recognises the fact that *enabling political, legal and regulatory environment* is one of the prerequisites for information society development. However, very little is done in this respect at national level, and efforts are underway to improve the situation that requires full support from regional and international partners. Furthermore, international organizations as well as the developed countries should support developing countries in putting in place enabling policy, legal and regulatory framework particularly in the development of market environment, protection of the consumer, the fair usage of IP addresses and internet governance.

Possible project areas identified that require financial and technical support

The implementation of concrete ICT programmes and projects is crucial to achieve the goals set by the action plans identified above. Ethiopia has developed a national ICT capacity building programme focusing in different areas to be implemented and executed in a 2 to 5 years time. The major programmes and projects identified in this framework include the following:

- Government administrative and service delivery
- Community access and service delivery
- Sector program development (ICTs in education, health, agriculture)
- Private sector development
- ICTs and knowledge economy development (ICTs physical infrastructure development, human resource development, and content and use of appropriate technology)
- Policy, regulatory and standards issues
- ICT human resources development
 - Capacity building in ICTs education and training infrastructure of the higher education system
 - Establishment of National ICTs excellence centre and network support technical system
 - Teaching ICTs to vocation stream educators
 - Launch distance-learning program in ICTs
 - ICTs curriculum development for use at the middle and higher-level education and training.

The funding will be executed in the form of acquiring the necessary tools and equipment, development of local applications and contents, development of distribution, access and local area connectivity, building up of institutional executing capacity, development of critical mass of skilled human resource, setting up of excellence centres for local languages, courseware, and national ICTs research capacities.

These activities require relatively significant amount of financial and technical resources from regional and international partners. Moreover, Ethiopia supports the Bamako 2002 Bureau proposal that a Digital Solidarity Fund be created as proposed by President Abdoulaye Wade to finance the programmes and pilot projects.