

8th EuroAfrica-ICT FP7 Awareness Workshop

Welcome address by Mrs Kagiso Chikane, Centre Manager: Meraka Institute of the CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research), South Africa

Dr Naomi Katunzi, the Permanent Secretary of the Tanzanian Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology of Tanzania, Ministry Officials from Tanzania and other African countries, the representative of the European Union, Mr Tim Clarke, the Head of Delegation in Tanzania, Professor J.W.A. Kondoro, Principal of our hosting institution, the Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology, ladies and gentlemen.

I am honoured to welcome you to the 8th EuroAfrica-ICT FP7 Awareness Workshop here in Tanzania, a country of immense natural beauty, a country that boasts the highest point in Africa, the well-known Mount Kilimanjaro, one of the most famous tracts of African wildlife reserves in the form of the Serengeti, Zanzibar, the pearl of the Indian Ocean, but also the deepest lake in Africa, Lake Tanganyika. I wish to thank the Tanzanian Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology and the Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology, known in short as the DIT, for assisting the Meraka Institute in arranging this Awareness Workshop in Dar es Salaam. We are indeed grateful for this collaboration with the DIT.

This strong sense of partnership with the DIT is what makes the hosting of this workshop here quite relevant. As South Africans, we are not experiencing your hospitality for the first time: we were hosted and not just hosted but were given a home far from home by Tanzanians before our liberation. We are excited to return to our second home and invite our colleagues, brothers and sisters in the region, to join hands with us in order to bridge the digital divide, conquer socio-economic problems, poverty, disease and unemployment through the utilisation of information and communication technology (ICT).

Chairperson, I am sure you would agree that we are fortunate to have an increasing awareness that science and technology, underpinned by research and development, are not a luxury of socio-economic development, but indeed, a prerequisite. We have to accept the unfortunate statistical evidence that sub-Saharan Africa currently contributes less than 1% of the global knowledge production. Neither can we deny the effects of the digital divide. Instead, we need to affirm the positive role that ICT can play in our development. In order for us to address our key developmental issues, we are fortunate that the world is responding to our need for partnership in this key area of science and technology and ICT. This workshop will contribute towards the formation of these partnerships.

The EuroAfrica-ICT project aims at connecting sub-Saharan African and European organisations for ICT partnerships in the context of the European Union or the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for research and technological development. It also aims to strengthen scientific and technological cooperation between the two regions by paving the way to wider and more concrete partnerships between EU and Africa.

One of the ways of achieving this is by hosting these Awareness Workshops. They are a key component of the EuroAfrica-ICT project to create a platform where sub-Saharan African and possible European organisations can interact and learn about each other as well as share knowledge about FP7.

Such partnerships are vital to our development on the continent. The Meraka Institute views this partnership with the EU as an important factor in enabling science and technology development in Africa. Other partners in this consortium are Orionis in France and the Panos Institute of West Africa in Senegal.

Programmes such as FP7 give us the opportunity to work as peers with the best researchers, research institutions and industry partners in order to tackle challenges that are important not only within Europe but those that have a global application. Engaging with this huge knowledge generating activity on a funded basis builds capacity in our own environments to tackle issues of present and future concerns.

The framework programme can also be seen as a tool to foster lasting relationships, not only in a North-South fashion but also in a South-South fashion that allows us to surface and celebrate our own valuable contributions to addressing global problems in the areas of health, poverty, education, the ageing population and ways of dealing with the knowledge society

When many of us were born, words such as internet and supercomputing did not exist, but looking at the impact of these technologies, for example, the cell phone, one realises the value of partnerships in these areas. Not only did the mobile phone, whose core functionality stems from an earlier FP, help us get connected on a continent that can be described as one without wires, but it also provides opportunities for children to get maths advice via Mxit or track the progression of the cyclone that hit Mozambique late 2006. These efforts do not happen in isolation, but require strong partnerships between industry, academia and communities. Looking at Tanzania, for instance, with around 4% of the country classified as arable and a strong reliance on agricultural production, one would welcome, for instance, the development of drought and disease-tolerant coffee plants through the application of advanced bio-informatics and supercomputing. Such partnership between the farmer, the scientist and the recipients of our produce will maximise the production capability of this valuable, but limited resource.

It has been through the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology that Meraka Institute has built a relationship with Tanzania. Indeed, in one of the first sub-Saharan ICT FP6 projects, the IST-Africa project, the institute was joined by COSTECH as one of the partners. Tanzania also forms part of the follow-up project of IST-Africa in the FP7. You are therefore one of the few African countries that can boast of its participation in the programme, showing that it can be done! We are also looking forward to concrete partnerships in exploiting the recently donated IBM BlueGene supercomputer, with discussions with Tanzanian organisations under way already. Further partnership opportunities are being created by the current late-stage negotiations on Wireless Africa with the International Development Research Centre or IDRC. Tanzania has been identified as a country partner in this ambitious initiative.

The word Meraka described a concept that is quite easily understood in a country such as Tanzania where we are no strangers to raising cattle. It is a word in a few of the local languages in the South, meaning the “village commons”, the place where all bring their cattle and gain from the common grazing ground. The Meraka Institute that is hosting this workshop was launched in May 2005 as a national strategic intervention of South Africa to transform human capital in its system of innovation to support an economic shift to production orientation in ICTs, as opposed to the current consumption orientation. It has a wider scope than just South Africa as reflected in its formal name: The African Advanced Institute for Information and Communications Technology. As an African Institution, it is therefore only natural that we - as consortium partners on the EuroAfrica-ICT project - emphasise the need to mobilise technical innovation and knowledge through partnerships in Africa.

The activities of the Meraka Institute are focused on the following areas:

The **Technology Research Programme** whose focus is to build critical mass in ICT research to create world-class ICT research activities and initiatives. The research areas are:

- Human Language Technology
- Remote Sensing Research e.g. Advanced Fire Monitoring Service
- Distributed Sensor Networks

This programme also manages South Africa’s cyberinfrastructure programme on behalf of the South African Department of Science and Technology which includes:

- The Centre for High Performance Computing (CHPC); and
- The South African National Research Network (SANReN)

In addition, we form partnerships with multi-national ICT companies, such as SAP, Intel, IBM and CISCO to do research within our context for a global audience. A partnership such as the SAP/Meraka Unit for Technology Development is an example of these partnerships.

The Application Innovation Programme aims at improving the quality of life through applied research and Innovation in ICT. The activities of this programme include:

- ICT in disability
- ICT for youth, education and gender
- ICT access
- Digital Doorway
- ICT for rural development

The **Human Capital Development (HCD) programme** seeks to create a system to produce and absorb 300 PhDs a year in South Africa in selected ICT fields of strategic importance by 2015. This will be achieved in partnership with the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

To ensure that the Meraka spirit is visible in all that we do, we embraced open source as one of the key drivers in the institute. Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) forms part of the ethos of the Meraka Institute and is seen to be key to building an inclusive information society. Meraka Open Source Centre (OSC) contributed to the adoption of FOSS implementation and strategy by the South African Government last year. The institute will contribute to the migration from proprietary software to the adoption of open standards by government departments. It has also been given a task by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to also migrate it from proprietary software to the adoption of open standards.

The Meraka Institute is very active in the FP. We are not only creating awareness about the programme, but actively using it to support our strategic goals. We are also keen to involve partners from other parts of Africa to join our future proposals to share the benefit and the learning we built up over the years. We currently have active FP7 projects in the area of e-Infrastructures (BELIEVE II), the follow-up on this START project (EuroAfrica-ICT), a project in the disaster management area (IRMA), projects in the remote sensing and satellite data area (AIDA and GeoDevCast) and road mapping of low-cost devices for developing regions (Digital World Forum).

In promoting the use of ICTs within a framework of science and technology, the Meraka Institute believes that the use of technology will enable greater economic and social developments in Africa.

You are thus invited to participate in this EuroAfrica Awareness Workshop as sub-Saharan researchers and organisations. Let us build ICT partnerships that will develop and strengthen scientific and technological cooperation between sub-Saharan and European organisations.

Your active participation in the workshop will make it a success and we are looking forward to many partnerships and projects, which will emerge over the next two days.

Thank you.