Research and Education Networks as a tool for supporting education and research in Africa

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Agenda

• About the AAU
• AAU and Research and Education Networks
• Why Research and Education Networks?
• Challenges and Opportunities
About the AAU

- Established in 1967 in Rabat, Morocco
- To date: 260+ member institutions in 47 African countries; all regions represented
- Various programmes (emerge from 4-your core-programmes): Quality Assurance, DATAD, Fellowship programmes, Staff exchange programmes, MRCI, Response to HIV/AIDS, University-Industry linkages, Research Management, ICT (especially research and education networking), …
AAU and R&E Networking

- At 11th AAU General Conference in Cape Town (February 2005): focus on ICT, especially bandwidth access issues
- Parallel event: PAREN; strong recommendations to address issue of access to adequate and affordable bandwidth for African universities
- Mandate given to the AAU Secretariat to set up a Unit on R&E networking
AAU and R&E Networking (cont’d)

- REN Unit established at AAU Secretariat in 2006, with support from IDRC, PHEA and ACBF
- Role of the Unit:
  - Act as focal point for ICT initiatives for African higher education (build synergies)
  - Address issue of access to adequate and affordable bandwidth
  - Advocacy and awareness raising of policy and decision makers
  - Clearinghouse for ICT resources
  - Capacity building (in collaboration with strategic partners)
Why Research and Education Networks?

- For more than 20 years: RENs have fueled innovation in networking technologies and have catalyzed scientific cooperation at global level
- Until recently: Africa not taking full advantage of this opportunity due to lack of adequate infrastructure
- Bandwidth demand for many e-Science applications/projects cannot be met at reasonable cost by using the general (public) Internet infrastructure
- RENs even more crucial for Africa (researchers’ isolation, participation in global research projects, brain gain, massification, resource sharing, etc.)
Challenges

- Inadequate telecommunications regulatory environment in most countries
- Near-monopoly position of operators in many countries
  - At continental level: 90% of international traffic controlled by only 8 operators
  - But situation changing rapidly
- Costly technology still used in many countries (VSAT)
  - Situation changing too, with fibre infrastructure being deployed widely
- Human resources
- Reliable power supply
Opportunities

- Increased awareness of policy and decision makers
- Telecom regulators and private sector (especially telecom operators) more receptive to REN message
- Development partners more and more favourable to supporting REN development (e.g. AfricaConnect funded by EU, World Bank and other institutions’ initiatives)
- Government support through using government infrastructure (e.g. ADIE in Senegal and NITA in Ghana)
- Strong REN communities at national, regional and continental levels
- Support of international REN community
- First class research institutions/teams ready to take leading roles in world class research projects (e.g. Malaria Research Intitute in Mali; HIV/AIDS Research Team in Senegal)
THANK YOU!

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