

EUROAFRICA-ICT/P8 FP7 AWARENESS & TRAINING WORKSHOP (OCTOBER 9-10, 2012 - TUNIS, TUNISIA)

EVENT REPORT



INTRODUCTION

The EuroAfrica-ICT FP7 Awareness and Training Workshop took place on October 9-10, 2012 at the Ramada Plaza Hotel in Tunis, Tunisia. The workshop was organized by the EuroAfrica-ICT/P8 FP7 project under the aegis of the European Commission (DG CONNECT: International Relations Unit) and with the support of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies (MINCOM) of Tunisia. The workshop aimed at raising awareness in Tunisia and northern Africa as a whole on the ICT theme of the European Union's Framework Programmes (FP) for research and technological developments and enhancing the participation of African organisations in EU-funded collaborative ICT research projects. Participation was free of charge, pre-registration was compulsory and subject to selection by the organising committee. The number of attendees was more than expected: 61 participants from several countries (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Libya, South Africa, France and China) attended the workshop, among them 33% academics, 47% technologists, 20% Government officials.

The EuroAfrica-ICT Awareness and Training workshop featured keynote speeches, thematic presentations, networking sessions, birds-of-a-feather (BoF) sessions, and a cocktail sponsored by Orange Tunisie.

Following the closing of the workshop, a group of participants had the opportunity of visiting two ICT laboratories based in Tunis.

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

The workshop aimed at raising awareness in Africa on the ICT theme of the European Union's Framework Programmes (FP) for Research and Technological Developments and at enhancing the participation of African organisations in EU-funded collaborative ICT research projects.



This was done by introducing local stakeholders to the cooperation opportunities offered by EU FPs and by contributing to the refinement of focused Africa-EU ICT research priority ideas.

DAY 1: OCTOBER 9, 2012

The workshop was opened on Tuesday, October 9, by **Dr Fahmi Chelly** (General Manager of the Technological Park of Communication, Tunisia), who welcomed all speakers, delegates and session chairs to the workshop and briefly presented to the audience the EuroAfrica-ICT/P8 project.

On behalf of Mongi Marzouk, the Minister of Information and Communication Technologies in Tunisia, **Mongi Thameur** gave the first opening speech of the event: he recognized that innovation in ICT is seen as one of the most promising areas for Africa as it involves many easy-to-deploy and affordable technologies which can address important technological and societal challenges in various sectors, including ICT Infrastructure, ICT Health, ICT Learning, ICT Government, water management, energy savings, etc. He acknowledged that the workshop had all good elements to be a success and expressed his good wishes for the following two days.

Speaking in the opening session, **Rajeh Khemiri**, the European Union Representative to Tunisia, stressed the Tunisian participation in FP7 projects in different sectors and its status of partnership. He stressed the need to help the EC and the AUC in identifying possible impediments in fostering cooperation between the two regions and in finding the right means to overcome them.

The opening speeches concluded with the General Manager of the Telecommunications Studies and Research Centre (CERT), Tunisia, **Rached Hamza**, who welcomed all participants to Tunisia and emphasized the importance of ICT for the economic and social development of Tunisia. He mentioned that the main purpose of the workshop was to stimulate dialogue, awareness on the EU R&D Framework Programme, enhance participation of African organizations in the next FP7/Horizon 2020/ICT calls for proposals and fine tune the identification of ICT research priorities and better understanding of the ICT research framework in Northern Africa. He then officially opened the EuroAfrica-ICT/P8 FP7 Awareness & Training Workshop.

Following the opening session and keynote addresses, the day continued with the following four plenary sessions:

- Introduction to the European Union Framework Programmes (FP7 + Horizon 2020) for research and development – ICT theme;
- FP7-ICT Work Programme for 2013 and open FP7 Calls for Proposals;
- Introduction to the EuroAfrica-ICT initiative;

- Case studies of Innovation in ICT;
- Success stories of the European Union Framework Programmes (FP7 + Horizon 2020) for research and development (ICT theme);
- Birds-of-a-Feather (BoF) sessions.

These sessions ensured that participants were introduced to the FP7 and Horizon 2020 programmes and upcoming calls for proposals, as well as the EuroAfrica-ICT initiative. Participants listened to very interesting success stories on ICT research presented by several researchers from Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Egypt and South Africa, outlining opportunities and challenges that these countries have experienced in terms of ICT research projects.

Birds-of-a-Feather (BoF) sessions:



By definition, a "Birds-of-a-Feather" (BoF) session is an informal meet-up at conferences or workshops where attendees group together based on a shared interest and carry out discussions without any pre-planned agenda. BoFs can facilitate networking and partnership formation among subgroups. "Birds-of-a-Feather" sessions generally allow for more audience interaction than the panel discussions typically seen at conventions. The discussions are not completely unguided, though, as there is still a discussion moderator or facilitator.

During the workshop, participants took part in BoF sessions and were divided into three groups to discuss three ICT research themes, according to their own personal interest and experience: ICT learning, ICT infrastructure, and ICT governance. This allowed for in-depth discussions as each topic had a facilitator and a rapporteur who both had to give feedback on Day 2 about the group discussions. Participants in each group shared their insights and perspectives regarding ICT research priorities in each area, expressing their views on challenges, priorities and recommendations related to future EU-African collaboration.

Each BoF group was requested to respond to the following questions with respect to their theme:

- What do you regard as the most important challenges where ICT can play an enabling role?
- How can ICT address those main challenges?
- What are, in your opinion, short term (<5yr) priorities in ICT research to consider?
- What are, in your opinion, long term (>5yr) priorities in ICT research to consider?
- What other factors will ensure success of ICT research projects?



These "Birds-of-a-Feather" sessions allowed workshop participants to:

- Exchange information and ideas on specific ICT thematic topics of their choice;
- Network with peers in the same research area;
- Discuss ideas with the EuroAfrica-ICT/P8 consortium;
- Engage in discussions with potential partners and establish possible future collaborations; and
- Consider possible involvement in EU FP7/Horizon2020 collaborative projects.

The first day ended with a **networking cocktail reception** sponsored by Orange Tunisie, offering participants a chance to relax while exchanging ideas and contact details.

DAY 2: OCTOBER 10, 2012

The second day of the workshop (October 10) was opened and moderated by **Ms. Karine Valin** (Managing Director of Sigma-Orionis & Coordinator of the EuroAfrica-ICT/P8 project), thereafter followed by a presentation of **Dr Barend Taute** (R&D Contract Manager, EuroAfrica-ICT/P8 Regional Contact Point for Southern Africa) on Africa-EU joint ICT research priorities. He emphasized the importance of participants taking part in Euro-Africa programmes to build international collaboration, and to begin now by putting forth applications for the next call for proposals closing in January 2013. Participants in the BoF sessions were also encouraged to find a way of building and strengthening capacities in ICT research.

Ms. Faiza Barkia (Telecommunications Studies and Research Centre, Tunisia) gave a presentation to introduce the EuroAfrica-ICT/P8 database of African research centres in the ICT field, while **Dr. Ali Yahiaoui** (Chief ICT officer, Department of Transport & ICT, African Development Bank, Tunisia) presented Africa's ICT Trends and the AfDB Strategy.

BIRDS-OF-FEATHERS-SESSIONS: MAIN OUTCOMES

The facilitators of each birds-of-a-feather session taking place on the first day of the workshop summarised their respective session outcomes to the audience on the second day of the workshop: **Mr. Mansour Bouchniba** (National Office of Telecommunications – Tunisia) reported on the ICT Infrastructure group discussion; **Prof. Ahlame Begdouri** (Professor, MoICT coordinator, Faculty of Science and Technology of the University of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, Morocco) provided feedback on the ICT Learning session and **Mr. Khaled Sellami** (Director General, e-Government Unit, Presidency of the Government of Tunisia) summarised the ICT Government session. This wrap-up session was followed by questions and answers that allowed participants attending other thematic groups to express themselves and to eventually make links with the concerns of their own working group. Participants made a significant effort to develop ideas for credible Euro-African ICT research projects. The challenge now is to develop and refine further these emerging projects ideas.



- **ICT Infrastructure**

During the ICT Infrastructure session the following areas were discussed:

Challenges: Providing support for a new generation of telecom services; providing end-to-end environments to deliver the expected services; integrate new technologies and standards allow resources, systems and infrastructures sharing; provide solutions to improve the income/cost ratio; enabling service assurance for users and revenue assurance for telcos.

Role of ICT: Improving and using technical standards and solutions; Operating new generation of networks for new generation of services; user devices to be upgradable and application compliant; Taking advantage of mutualisation and sharing technical and business/law paradigms; Using a global integrated Telco IS; Going through new concepts of virtualisation and cloud computing/communicating; Having the ecosystem follow the expected/provided solutions.

Short-term priorities: Providing ICT anywhere, anytime, anyhow in relation with the Business model; Ensuring a fair use with respect to the contractual service level; Having services provided in correlation to the expectations (added value); Ensuring the interoperability between access, network and service provisioning; Ensuring the openness of the network to other actors (SP, partners, etc.).

Long-term priorities: Enabling the infrastructure capacity to follow the evolution of expectations; Integrating evolutions of standards, protocols and recommendations; Improving the engineering capability of network systems to better serve subscribers; Simplifying access and network architectures to ease engineering; Allowing better flexibility and stabilisation for architecture schema evolution; Migrating towards the new generation of handsets and equipment.

Success Factors: Collaboration between universities and companies; Having governments motivate companies to invest in research; Encouraging public projects to prompt private involvement; Encouraging collaboration between international teams/organisations; Setting up sharing mechanisms between telecom actors.

- **ICT Learning**

In the e-Learning session the following were identified:

Challenges: Providing education in geographical areas where there is no infrastructure for classical learning and where access to material infrastructure is affordable; Distance learning in areas where not enough competences exist for a specific topic; Generalization of e-Government; Facilitating access to ICT based learning; Introducing new ways of learning based on ICT; Changing the culture of the community targeted by the ICT learning; Insisting on ICT competence development for those people; Life long learning independently of time and location; Introducing new ways of learning based on ICT.

Role of ICT: Well designed and implemented telecommunication infrastructure (DSL and mobile); Dissemination of success stories; Generalization of ICT usage since early stages education; Strategy to build up trustworthy tools in ICT for learning; Develop database related to institutions (universities, schools, etc.) delivering specific formal diplomas; Develop new innovative infrastructures for learning; Using ICT based learning to learn English.



Short-term priorities: Improving learning platforms to support wireless communications; Mobile learning (supporting the usage of new mobile devices); Design of new and innovative ways for learning using Web2.0 and social media; Support context aware learning.

Long-term priorities: Pervasive learning; Awareness to the context in a proactive manner; Smart classroom and smart university

Success Factors: Funding; Competency of Human Resources); Easing patenting IPR; Easing research management for the researchers (subcontracting research management).

- **ICT Government**

The e-Government discussions focussed on these:

Challenges: Keeping/ maintaining citizens (patients) records; Managerial competencies of public servants; Citizens empowerment (participation and transparency); New easy services channels (for example: mobile); Availing governmental information; Government to government collaboration (interoperability); Government procurements; Government inventories.

Role of ICT & short-term priorities: Development of a national databases for citizens' (patients') records; e-learning tools for enhancing management skills for public servants; e-participation and e-transparency platforms; Providing public services through websites and mobiles; Dematerialization of processes; Open government data portals and platforms; Integration of e-services through government institutions; Collaborative tools for government; e-procurements systems; Inventories management systems.


Long term priorities: Smart cards for every citizens; Zero paper public services

Success Factors: Linkage to society needs; University-government-private sector partnership; Stakeholders involvements; Deployability.

LAB VISITS

In the afternoon of the second day of the workshop a group of delegates in the event was given the opportunity to visit a couple of ICT laboratories:

- TELNET Holding is a Tunisian group of companies specialized in innovation and high technology consulting. TELNET operates on a front office / back office model, it primarily offers engineering services offshore and near-shore on behalf of major international groups. TELNET has a technical team of over 500 Consultants, Engineers and Project Managers from different backgrounds: American engineering schools, major European schools and Tunisian engineering schools. It works in the following sectors: Transport & Automotive, Defense & Avionics, Security & Smart cards, Industry, Information Systems (www.groupe-telnet.com).
- The National School of Computer Sciences (ENSI) located at the campus of the Manouba University and hosting two research laboratories: RIADI and CRISTAL. Delegates were welcomed by the Dean, Professor_Abdelfattah Belgith, who presented



the centre and talked about his research and teaching experience in Tunisia and USA. (www.ensi.rnu.tn).

EVENT OUTPUTS

This important event focused on Euro-Africa collaborative initiatives addressing research, development and innovation in ICT. The event succeeded in achieving the main objectives as follows:

- **FP7 Awareness:** Participants were made aware of the opportunities and requirements as well as procedural issues for participation. The EuroAfrica-ICT/P8 project offered assistance with understanding the requirements and connecting with European partners. The general realisation was that there are barriers to overcome, but participation is definitely possible (some success stories exist already) and it is certainly beneficial. Mutual benefit and support will drive future collaboration.
- **Euro-Africa ICT Collaboration Challenges:** The discussions highlighted the realities of African partnership: the expertise and interest may exist, but travel funding is limited, research infrastructure may be limited, co-funding is very hard to get, and meeting potential partners for proposals is difficult. Governments should play a leading role to enable scientists at universities and research centres (e.g. through funding instruments) to meet counterparts, attend EuroAfrica-ICT events and provide co-investment to participate in FP7 proposals.
- **Euro-Africa ICT Research Focus Areas:** The presentations on ICT challenges, success stories and opportunities provided new insights. The BoF sessions provided a new batch of research ideas in ICT Infrastructure, Learning and Government that will serve as input to the Project Task responsible for Analysing Research Priorities.
- **Networking:** With attendance from a number of northern African countries, the EuroAfrica-ICT Initiative made new acquaintances with researchers from those countries, including some that participated in these events for the first time – notably researchers from Libya and Morocco. The networking with researchers, public officials, industry and funding agencies provided valuable connections for future collaboration and networking.
- **Lab Visits:** These visits emphasized that good work is being done. Students are trained in ICT, research is being conducted, industry is developing solutions for their local and global customers. This gives hope for Tunisia as well as the possibilities for socio-economic impact through stronger Euro-Africa collaboration on ICT research and innovation.

PROCEEDINGS

Event proceedings are available at: http://euroafrica-ict.org/2012/10/22/proceedings_euroafrica-ict-fp7-awareness-and-training-workshop/



CONCLUSIONS

The 'EuroAfrica-ICT/P8 FP7 Awareness & Training Workshop' in Tunisia was a successful meeting between European and African researchers, public officials, funders and industry. The lively discussions highlighted some of the key challenges with cooperation but also provided new insights into the needs and opportunities for collaboration.

It was clear from the discussions that there is strong interest in collaboration from both Europe and Africa, but there are also significant challenges that will require creative and bold solutions.

Finally – the great potential of ICT as an enabling technology for socio-economic development in “across-the-board” thematic areas was stressed. This strengthens the resolve of both sides to seek stronger collaboration into the future.