

**Reports back of the three topic facilitators at
the Africa Information Ethics Conference
(<http://www.africainfoethics.org/program.html>)**

Working document

**Topic 1
Foundations of African Information Ethics
By Dennis Ocholla**

Summary of findings of group 1 (themes 1-4)

Theme 1	Respect for human dignity-information based rights;
Theme 2	Freedom of expression, Freedom of communication;
Theme 3	Freedom of access to information (IP legislation, open-access movement);
Theme 4	Information wrongdoings, information corruption, information injustice.

Issues

The main issues identified by group 1 are:

- Getting information needed by the people, to the people.
- Respecting the individual, and their associated human rights.
- Preserving democracy as a fundamental value.
- Interpreting ICT more broadly: Technology + books+ storytelling.
- Recognising the public right of access to public information.
- Finding a balance between rights and responsibilities.
- Taking the following variables into consideration in the transfer of information: standard of living, education, quality of life, and the different situations in strata of society.
- Accommodating the following issues in an infrastructure development: Data protection directive, freedom of expression and other basic information rights.
- Regarding education as a fundamental right for all people
- Ensuring a balance in media reporting
- Regulating NGO activities
- Recognising that faith-based organizations(Fobs) can play a role in preventing AIDS
- Recognising the diversity of culture;
- Recognising ethics and values for freedom of expression
- Noting South African ethics-transformation (African and Western philosophical reflection)
- Focusing on society not individual – specifically within the African context
- Acknowledging different ethnic groups, diversity and intercultural communications (e.g., multiple languages)
- Recognising the role of values and ethics of communications
- Recognising the importance of academic freedom of expression

Challenges

The main challenges identified by group 1 are as follows:

- The availability as well as relevance of information (content)
- Sensitivity towards gender issues as well as finding of ways to integrate this into the broader discussion
- The recognition of disabilities as well as sensitivity towards these
- The differentiation between personally identifiable information, information in the public domain, and information that belongs to a business.
- The value of literacy (basic literacy - cannot read: computer literacy, information literacy) Questions relate to the following: once you have information, what does it mean? How do you interpret and evaluate it?
- The format in which information is presented and how this effects the accessibility thereof (for example print, digital/electronic, oral)
- The question of distribution and equality: How should one decide who gets what and what role should poverty play in this regard.
- The importance of universal access and the role of libraries, publishers, and copyright.
- The attitudes of governments towards information policy issues, as well the political will to invest in the information related issues.
- The role of culture – inequalities with regards to accessing information.
- The role of location with regards to access and use of information for example urban versus rural
- The difference between private and public information
- Diversity issues regarding information needs must be addressed.
- The impact of legal (intellectual property rights issues), technological, individual, social and economic issues regarding access to information
- The challenges associated with affordable and sustainable information infrastructures in Africa
- Access to information and the problem associated with competencies in finding, using, and creating content.
- Access to information and the role of mutual trust and respect.
- Identifying the variables that determine the success of open access because it is essential to the achievement of other social goals such as food security. This must go hand in hand with the protection of personal privacy, cultural integrity, and expend production of and access to the African content

Recommendations

Group 1 made the following recommendations:

- Current IP rights should be revisited to reduce the barriers that they represent.
- Governments should prioritize access to information.
- Respect for indigenous knowledge as a right.
- Promote an understanding of information literacy.
- Access to information requires incorporating African information ethics in policy making in areas such as education, telecommunications, media, and research and development.

- Strengthening collective ownership of IP; open standards, and the use of economic models that promote African autonomy.
- Education of people to know their rights and responsibilities
- Acknowledgement of the right that access is needed to express one's human rights.
- The recognition that IP protects the rights of the individual; communal law doesn't.
- Recordkeeping is a key starting point.
- Provide access to and provision of public information to empower people to redress gender, cultural, social and other inequities.
- People should have access to records about themselves and to correct and update personal information.
- People should be able to ensure that this information is used only for the purposes that they authorized. Public information should be available free of charge.
- Conservation and maintaining integrity are the responsibility of those who store information.
- The urge for stringent data protection laws and standards for information security.
- All those who have power, including businesses and government, must be accountable for deliberately releasing incorrect information.
- Maintaining a plurality of independent media is important to countering misinformation.

Topic 2
CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND GLOBALIZATION
By Peter Kanyandago

Summary of report back of group 2 (themes 5-8) dealing with cultural diversity and globalization

Theme 5	Promotion and protection of IK;
Theme 6	Global security, human security, privacy, transparency;
Theme 7	e-government and related topics;
Theme 8	Cultural diversity and development.

Promotion and protection of IK – group 5

The issues

- It was argued in the group that IK is knowledge of any given community, but in the context of Africa it is presented as distinct from Western knowledge. It was pointed out that Western Knowledge has often denied and marginalised IK.
- Having said this, the group also agreed that the use of the term IK sometimes can have pejorative connotations.
- It was agreed that IK is valuable knowledge, scientific in its own way, and is used in problem solving, originates from people themselves, is predominantly orally transmitted and belongs to the community.

Management of Indigenous Knowledge systems (IKS)

- Since African IKS have been marginalised, there is urgency to promote and protect them.
- In addition to the more “traditional” means, such as libraries, museums and archives it was felt that there is need to devise means from and in the communities, not forgetting that an elder who dies in a village is equivalent to losing a library.

Strategies & Recommendations including those related to ethics

- The first is to get communities more involved in research and also to communicate research findings to them.
- It was argued that the mainstream IKS are in people’s lives especially in education systems.
- The need was expressed of putting legislation, including Intellectual Property Rights, in place that would appropriately protect IKS.
- The promotion of South-South collaboration would enhance the development of IKS.
- The creation of IK centres was suggested as this will contribute to the development of IK.
- It was agreed that the research findings, based on IK, should be owned by the people from whom it originated.
- The group reached consensus that IK should be

- inclusive: e.g. involve women, elders and key knowledge holders;
- critical: bring out the negative and positive aspects of IK.

GLOBAL SECURITY, HUMAN SECURITY, PRIVACY, TRANSPARENCY –group 6

- The present paradigm related to the theme conflicts frequently with the individual concerns of freedom, privacy and transparency: assumption that everyone is a potential crook!
- Hence, need for a new paradigm based on ‘trust as foundation’ for privacy, security, and transparency.

Challenges and strategies

- Perceived needs of the administrators do not always coincide with the felt needs of the users, hence need to pay more attention to the latter, by emphasising development from within
- Similarly, approaches to gender issues should address how being woman and man is constructed in a given society

E-GOVERNMENT AND RELATED TOPICS – group 7

- Concept: e-government means using ICT to improve all governmental activities to achieve the most effective contribution to the development processes; it is not primarily about using ICT for administrative purposes
- This calls for change management because use of ICT goes with change in behaviour also
- Given the importance of e-government in national development, the following should be considered when implementing e-government programmes:

To be considered

- Develop e-government models and strategies that are relevant for Africa: importance of local contexts and situations
- Establish national e-government monitoring and evaluation mechanisms
- Put in place legislation dealing with information ethics, e.g. in relation to privacy and dealing with personal information
- Promote use of open source applications to avoid monopolistic practices in terms of software

Challenges and strategies

- Africa is not in position to apply e-government programmes because many governments lack basic infrastructure, power supply is not stable, and sometimes democratic processes are not respected
- However, use of e-government should be seen as a process and one does not have to wait for a time when all the necessary conditions will be in place

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND DEVELOPMENT – group 8

- Prerequisites to consider when using ICT to promote development in a situation of cultural diversity
 - There must be cultural sensitivity
 - Respect for and promotion of right to cultural identity

- Development must be an unfolding/flourishing from within a given people's culture and experience
- Cultural diversity can bring about problems of discrimination but nevertheless can also lead to mutual understanding

What is culture?

- We note that culture has been understood and defined in different ways, raising the question as to who should decide what culture is, but also
- Affirm that culture is about questions that a people ask about their survival and the answers they give, and also questions that outsiders ask about those people
- But are there common questions, answers and standards shared among cultures?
- Ethical issues and strategies
- Rethink concepts of wealth and poverty: while Africa is portrayed as poor in the media, it is very rich in many respects (e.g. languages and resources) and there is a risk of internalising these negative re-presentations
- UNESCO should encourage countries to take measures against malicious and stereo-types re-presentations of Africans in the media
- Develop an ethics of critical thinking especially in our education systems
- Create conditions for dialogue where the "other" is seen as a subject with rights and not to be dominated
- The African population has to be sensitised in such a way that it is equipped to deal and cooperate freely with the external world

Topic 3
DEVELOPMENT, POVERTY AND ICT
By Kingo Mchombu

Summary of findings of group 3 (themes 9-12)

- Theme 9 Using ICT for better life**
Theme 10 Internet and Exclusion
Theme 11 North-South flow of information and information imperialism
Theme 12 Brain Drain

Using ICT for better life – group 9

It was agreed that ICT can be an effective tool for creating a better life for all in Africa. However, it can also be a tool for harm if not properly applied. It is essential to have an ethical framework which promotes both local content and indigenous knowledge. An inclusive approach is needed but must have capacity building for citizens and service providers. Adequate resources are also needed for infrastructure and infostructure. An enabling policy and regulatory environment must also be created.

Internet and Exclusion - group 10

The group felt that the problems of exclusion require to be addressed from a broad framework of social, political, historical and geopolitical contexts. These factors vary from country to country. The use of the internet is very low in Africa – 2.5%. This implies that the whole continent is marginalized. Solutions need to be from within Africa so as to be appropriate rather than imposed externally, on ICT needs, capabilities, and partnerships. Market behaviour must be addressed with care by government, academicians and civil society particularly for the poorest of the poor as the market forces may further marginalize such groups.

North-South flow of information and information imperialism – group11

The flow of information is dominated by flows from the North to the South and not vice versa. It was also argued in the group that very little South – South flow of information occurs. This creates unequal power relations and perspectives. The group came to the conclusion that this is partly the result of low information production capacities in the South, colonial legacies, and language barriers to communications.

Brain Drain – group 12

Africa has lost vast resources through the brain drain of high level experts to foreign countries. However, there is need to recognize the right of individual to freedom of movement in and out of Africa hence the challenge is to create incentives which ensures that newly graduated experts do not leave the continent. Also have policies in place to tap the expertise of Africans abroad who wish to remain there such as dual citizenships, as well as other incentives. A second category of brain drain occurs in indigenous knowledge when elders succumb to old age. The third type of brain drain happens when the young highly educated people leave rural areas and migrate to urban centres thus draining the rural communities of human resources.

Key issues related to poverty, development and ICT

Several key issues were identified by the groups in this discussion. These are:

i) The emphasis on ICT/digital divide tends to ignore information divide which is the other side of the coin. Solutions are thus incomplete because they address only part of the equation.

ii) The focus of investments in ICT focuses exclusively on infrastructure but ignores content production and management.

iii) African researchers and governments need to work in partnership to find solutions to Africa's ICT and digital possibilities, rather than the latter depending on researchers who are predominantly northern based.

iv) Exclusion of many groups from the internet has not received attention because of top down development agendas. Africa is as a whole marginalized when it comes to internet usage.

v) The over reliance on market forces to drive the ICT agenda, influenced by neo-liberal thinking, underplays the potential catastrophe which might occur as a result of market failure to address the needs of the poor in an increasingly ICT dependent world.

vi) Solutions to Africa's internet problems have to be rooted in the realities of Africa rather than being imposed from elsewhere because of low ICT capabilities in African states.

vii) The dilemma posed by brain drain in a continent which is short of expertise in almost every field is one worthy of urgent attention. Yet, individual rights to freedom of movement needs to be recognized.

viii) IKS is mostly in the oral format but this is a fragile storage medium as the elder generation passes away because of old age.

x) The opportunities of urban Africa is a magnet for the educated to migrate away from the drudgery of rural areas leaving only the elderly, the young and those who have come back to die of HIV/AIDS.

xi) Control of information flow and the media industry is largely in the hands of the powerful North governments and the multinational agencies. Africa need to educate herself on agendas hidden behind many protocols and instruments which African governments often are forced to sign.

x) The South - South exchange of information is low although countries of the South face similar problems and exchanging experiences would be of mutual benefit.

Recommendations of the group are as follows:

i) Governments and international agencies such as the UN need to invest not only in ICT infrastructure but equally in local content production and management.

ii) Aggressive education, training and awareness campaigns are needed in schools, communities, and public and private organizations to accelerate the adoption of ICTs for development.

iii) Social exclusion requires urgent attention within a broad framework which includes historical, political, social and geographical factors. These factors tend to be country specific.

iv) A research partnership between government and academia and civil society is required for Africans to come up with solutions to the unique situation of respective countries.

v) Governments in Africa should formulate policies with incentives to retain high level expertise in the continent, and attract those who have left to come back or to work for the continent in short assignments.

vi) Dialogue is essential between Africa and the developed world for a transfer of resources to compensate for the brain drain out of Africa to the developed countries.

vii) There is need to use ICT more extensively to record and store IKS for the use by both present and future generations.

viii) There is need to address and remove barriers to the equitable flow of information South to North and South to South.

ix) Governments are called upon to appreciate the scholarly and cultural production of their citizens.