



# UNION GEODESIQUE ET GEOPHYSIQUE INTERNATIONALE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF GEODESY AND GEOPHYSICS

## PROJECT SYNOPSIS

### **eGY-Africa: reducing the digital divide for science and education**

#### **Principal Participants**

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#### **Supporting Organizations**

IUGG (International Union of Geodesy & Geophysics),

IAGA (International Association of Geomagnetism & Aeronomy),

IAHS (International Association of Hydrological Sciences)

#### **Affiliated Principal Participants**

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2009 eGY-Africa Workshop Organising Committee (see below)

#### **Project plan**

##### **Objectives**

The ultimate goal of the eGY-Africa effort is to make African communities wealthier, safer, and more sustainable through full participation in the information revolution. The specific objective is to achieve better Internet access for scientists (and others) in Universities and similar research and education institutions in Africa by influencing decisions about resource allocation and aid support.

The aim of the 2009 eGY-Africa Workshop and planning meetings is to share information about the progress of eGY-Africa; raise awareness about the status of Internet access in African Universities, plans, and policies; heighten the common sense of purpose among eGY-Africa participants; strengthen and expand national groupings; and refine the action agenda.

##### **Project description: background and rationale, and work plan**

*Background.* It is widely acknowledged that the adoption of modern information and communication technologies is essential for achieving Millennium Development Goals in Africa. Poor Internet connectivity appears to be the single most important contributor to the growing divide that is isolating African scientists from mainstream modern science, education, and training opportunities and resources. Initiatives, such as eGY, proclaim that the information revolution enables scientists and educators in poor communities to enjoy the benefits of shared data, information, and services on equal

terms with their colleagues in rich communities. In Africa, this is a fantasy. In most cases, connection to the Internet is so poor that even maintaining simple email communication with colleagues is a major challenge. It is not uncommon to find motivated faculty members spending up to 10% of their income on private internet services.

*Rationale.* Scientists in Africa and their supporters outside want to do something about this situation. Scientists in Universities don't have money to fund better facilities and they don't make decisions about allocation of government resources. But they can influence decision-makers and funding bodies through advocacy at the institutional, national, and international levels. This can be done by providing well-informed statements about the present situation, policy commitments by high-level African bodies (such as the UN Economic Commission for Africa), problems, opportunities, and the benefits of participation in the information revolution.

*Strategy.* eGY-Africa's strategy is to provide a focus for bottom-up action by (geo)scientific communities, to ensure that action taken is well-informed and compliments existing initiatives with related objectives (such as the UN GAID program, the nascent IAP program: *Access to Scientific Information in Developing Countries*, plus activities of bodies such as INASP and ICTP). eGY-Africa is liaising with ICSU's Regional Office for Africa in this regard.

*Work Plan for eGY-Africa.* The key steps to be taken for eGY-Africa are:

- (1) Expand the group motivated participants and organisers, both within and outside Africa, leading to the establishment of national groups of activists in each African country. Use existing networks when possible (e.g., IHY national coordinators, CODATA national delegates, INASP contacts, ICSU-ROA contacts).
- (2) Assemble reference information about present status, plans, problems, policies, benefits, and opportunities, including case histories. Such information is to be used as a basis for consultation, raising awareness, and arguments why governments and donors should invest in Internet facilities. Steps underway are:
  - i. Questionnaire survey: expand the present test questionnaire in collaboration with ICTP (Sandro Radicella) to get information about the present status of Internet access for (geo)science and education for each country or region in Africa, new developments and plans, problems, benefits, and opportunities.
  - ii. Collaborate with the PingER Project and ICTP to measure and analyse Internet performance (response) throughout Africa.
  - iii. Articulate the benefits of good Internet access, the reasons for investing in ICT infrastructure, collate case histories, and produce recommendations.
  - iv. Find out what top-down action is being taken and what policies are already in place - through the African Union, the Economic Commission for Africa, NEPAD, INASP, ICSU's Regional Office for Africa, TWAS, and many others.
- (3) Identify and pursue an action agenda
  - o Identify areas and targets for advocacy, where scientists individually and through special interest groups, institutions, national, and international bodies (ICSU) can influence decisions about resource and aid allocations to improve Internet services.
  - o Engage with bodies and decision-makers to raise the profile of the needs of scientists and educators, and increasing awareness of the benefits of providing better Internet services.
  - o An important step yet to be explored is how best to approach major aid donors. Any action here needs to be carefully coordinated with other players.

*Work plan for the 2009 Workshop.*

At the eGY-Africa planning meeting in Addis Ababa, November 2007, the need for an Africa-wide workshop was identified as a necessary step in achieving eGY-Africa objectives. The Workshop is planned for 2009 and will be held in a francophone country. The organizing committee comprises:

<b>2009 Workshop Organising Committee</b>		
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We have since become aware of plans by the Inter-Academy Panel on International Issues (IAP) to run a series of annual workshops in developing countries as part of their program *Digital Knowledge Resources and Infrastructure in Developing Countries*. This program will be directed by the US CODATA Committee at the US National Academies. Paul Uhlir will play a lead role. We have just started to explore with Paul Uhlir the possibility of a joint workshop. We will also find out if the UN GAID program is interested in becoming involved. UN GAID and the IAP program have similar objectives, with a focus on reducing the digital divide in Africa.

## The Executive Committee

Executive Committee		
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