EuroAfrica-ICT continues to forge ICT R&D links

Presenting opportunities for research and development (R&D) cooperation in information and communications technology (ICT) between Africa and Europe in the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), was the aim of the successful 5th FP7 EuroAfrica-ICT Awareness Workshop. The event, which took place at the Gaborone International Conference Centre in Botswana on 8-9 October 2007, was hosted by consortium partner, the Meraka Institute (managed by the CSIR) with support from the Botswana Ministry of Communications, Science & Technology (MCST) and the University of Botswana.

START (also called the EuroAfrica-ICT initiative) is a project supported by the European Commission through its IST programme. The project is implemented by a consortium led by Sigma Consultants, specialising - through its Orionis division - in support services devoted to S&T international cooperation in the ICT field. The consortium includes two key African institutes focusing on ICT - the Meraka Institute and the Panos Institute West Africa (Senegal) through its CIPACO initiative.

START project coordinator at the Meraka Institute, Rebecca Naidoo, was pleased with the outcome of the Gaberone workshop. She confirmed that 82 participants attended, representing Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Kingdom of Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

"Our invited keynote speakers brought fresh perspectives to the table on the benefits of and ways to achieve collaborative ICT R&D," she confirms. These included Shafika Isaacs, Schooling Executive from Mindset (South Africa) that promotes technology-based education; consultant and passionate ICT applications supporter, Beza Belyaneh of Bezaspeaks; Robin Unuth, Head of ICT for the Southern African Development Community (SADC); and Mark Mokgware of the Botswana Telecommunications Authority.

Contributions by Meraka Institute staff members provided participants with useful and practical information on how to optimise FP7 opportunities. A 'Birds-of-a-Feather' session enabled interaction in ICT thematic areas of choice, further facilitating the identification of partners for collaboration.

Putting intentions into actions has been taken a step further through the formulation by the START team of an EU-Africa framework document. The consortium partners will present this manifesto at the Africa-EU Summit to be held in Lisbon in December 2007 by way of a statement of intent and an invitation to Europe to pursue collaboration.

START activities will continue unabated into 2008, with PIWA hosting the 6th FP7 Awareness Workshop in Nigeria and the Meraka Institute hosting the 7th FP7 Awareness Workshop planned for Tanzania in February 2008, also supported by the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH). This will be preceded by two South African workshops co-hosted by the Department of Science and Technology and planned for the second week in February 2008.