ICT policy
in Congo Brazzaville
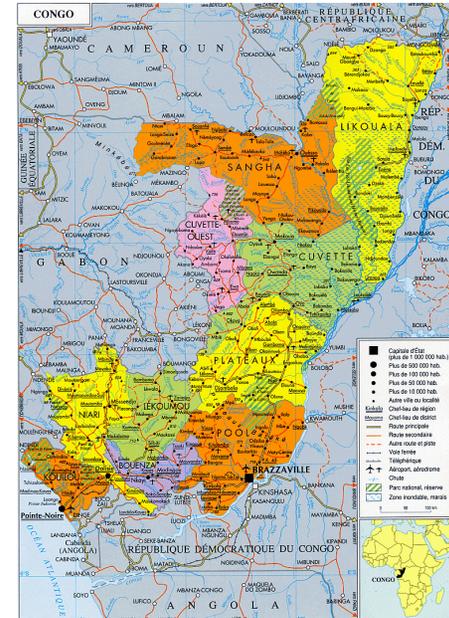
Sylvie Niombo, APC Africa Women
Co-coordinator
sylvie@apcwomen.org

www.apcwomen.org

2. **Strategic issues of the ICT policy**

- Since end of 2004, Congo Brazzaville has developped an ICT policy with support from the UNDP.

- The ICT policy focuses on 4 strategic issues : infrastructure and access to ICTs; development of products and services; capacity building; legal and institutional framework.

- In this presentation, we will only address the access and capacity building issues.

Plan

1. **General facts about Congo**

2. **Strategic issues of the ICT policy**

3. **Recommendations**

4. **Challenges**

5. **Gender and ICT policy resources and overview o WNSP Africa work**

1. General facts about Congo

- Congo Brazzaville is located in Central Africa, neighboring with DRC through Congo river.

- 3 millions of inhabitants, 51% of women. Women are pillars of families.

- The majority of the population lives in urban areas.

- Post conflict country. Armed conflicts over a period of 10 years. Infrastructure was destroyed and women became poorer. Small arms have been collected and ex-combatants reintegrated.

Objectives of the ICT Policy:

- To increase access of people to ICTs in urban and rural areas;
- To define a legal and regulatory framework for ICTs;
- To build capacities in ICTs;
- To Transform the education system through the use of ICTs;
- To promote good governance through the use of ICTs;
- To integrate Congo Brazzaville in the world market of information and particularly reinforce its position at the sub regional level by mobilising financial, material and human resources;

The ICT policy was elaborated to improve the existing situation.

•**Infrastructure and access to ICTs**:

Telephony : a market dominated by international GSM companies Celtel and MTN covering most of the biggest cities of the country. At least 800 000 of subscribers – in fact 26% of the population. 1 Landline phone company SOTELCO with very few users. The mobile phones are accessible to most of the population, but communication costs remain higher.

Because women are the most poor, they have few access to mobile phones compared to men. And the situation is worse for those living in rural areas, where they also face electricity problems.

- **Information technology and internet**

Computer equipment cost remains unaffordable to the population. E.g a second hand computer Pentium III cost 800 US$. The taxes on imported equipment are high.

There are more than 6 Internet Service Providers, some of them coming from DRC. Internet connection is costly, from 2000 US $ to 5000 US $ for equipment and monthly bills from 100 to 700 US $.

There are telecentres and cybercafes in 6 cities of the country. In some cities, they have closed because of taxes imposed by local authorities.

Telecentres and cybercafes have become popular and offer various services to the population. Many women working in telecentres.

- **Media:**

6 private TV and 6 radio stations; 2 public TV and 3 radio stations; at least 3 community radios, and more than 15 newspapers. But the radio and television coverage is generally limited to cities.

There is a problem of freedom of expression, some topics are vey sensitive. 90% of journalists are state employees. Political parties are often sources of media funds and this lead to politicization of newspapers.

Lack of modern equipment, alsmot no access to internet. Few women journalists work in print media because of low salaries, and lack of ICTs skills.

Capacity building

There's no real plan of building capacities in ICTs. Some public services have started to train their employees in basic ICTs skills, most of them are women. Many public offices don't have computer equipment and access to internet.
There is only one training centre at one Department of the national University, but demand is higher than the offer.

Very few specialized universities/colleges in ICTs training and the telecommunication sector in general. Most of students travel to DRC, Senegal, France and other countries. Very few percentage of women skilled in the ICTs and telecommunications at the postgraduate level.

Telecentres and NGOs play a key role in basic ICTs skills training.

3. Recommendations

The ICT policy document identifies actions to take in order to change the current situation.

About infrastructure and access:
- To develop and reinforce new and existing infrastructure in urban and rural areas.
- Connect the country to the fibre to reduce internet costs.
- To provide access to ICTs to schools, NGOs and community based organisations.
- To create telecentres in all regions in the country.
- To exempt computer equipment (from taxes)

About capacity building:

- To integrate ICTs in primary and secondary education and in universities.

- To create resources centres in ICTs, in some departments of the National University, in Ministries and municipalities.

- To support the creation of multimedia education centres in cities and in regions.

- To create an organisation that will fund capacity building initiatives in ICTs.

- To develop partnerships between national and foreign training and research organisations in the ICTs sector

- To train students and state employees in the use of Free and open source software.

4. Challenges

The actions defined in the ICT policy are not implemented for many reasons. E.g the change of Ministers in charge of ICTs has slowed down the process.

Financial and material resources have not been committed by the Government to implement the policy. Despite the political will, ICTs are not seen as a priority sector.

Weakness and lack of resources for civil society organisations to advocate on ICT policy. Lack of capacity among civil society organisations to adress ICT policy issues.

Lack of involvement of women and youth in the process of elaboration of ICT policy.

5. Gender and ICT policy resources

For updates, articles and information on Gender and ICT policy in Africa and in the world, please visit www.genderit.org maintained by the APC Women's Networking Support Programme.

Overview of WNSP Africa

- The WNSP Africa is a network of over 70 organisations and individuals that work to empower African women's organisations to access and use information and communication technologies (ICTs) for equality and Development. Working in partnership with women's organizations and with women in Africa we focus on women's empowerment through:

- **Lobbying and advocacy** on gender and ICT policy at national, regional and global level in partnership with other civil society organisations

- **Participation in regional and global events** by disseminating information, online discussion forums and running Internet cafes and providing ICT training

Information facilitation by providing information to women about gender and ICTs and how they can access useful tools and resources.

Providing regional support to women's organizations through developing their capacity to network and to use ICTs strategically.

Delivering ICT training to African women's organisations, networks and initiatives.

Conducting research in the area of gender and ICTs in Africa

More information on www.apcwomen.org

Thanks

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