



Introduction to eGYAfrica

Reducing the Digital Divide for Science and Education in Africa

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Summary

eGYAfrica is a bottom-up effort by scientists from Africa and elsewhere to achieve better Internet and Grid access in universities and similar research and education institutions in Africa. The aim is to make it possible for African scientists and educators to participate on equal terms with counterparts from the rest of the world. Strengthening the research and tertiary education sector in this way is considered a necessary step towards making African communities wealthier, safer, and more sustainable.

eGYAfrica seeks to influence decision-makers and service providers who are in a position to improve institutional Internet capabilities. Our strategy is to (i) encourage the formation of national and regional focus groups in Africa who share this objective, (ii) link with existing national and international bodies who share related goals, (iii) provide an information base and arguments to highlight the Digital Divide problem and the value of investing in a cyber-infrastructure for research and education, and (iv) engage with decision makers and service providers at all levels – institutional, national, regional, and internationally.

Background and support

eGYAfrica was initiated as an Electronic Geophysical Year 2007-2008 (eGY) effort to reduce the Digital Divide, with cooperation from the International Heliophysical Year (IHY) community. eGYAfrica now has links with the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the International Council for Science (ICSU) via ICSU's Regional Office for Africa in Pretoria, the ICSU Committee on Data for Science and Technology (CODATA), the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG), the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), and the International Association of Geomagnetism & Aeronomy (IAGA). In-kind support is provided by several institutions.

Why eGYAfrica?

Adoption of modern information and communication technologies is transforming research and education worldwide, and is widely acknowledged as essential for achieving Millennium Development Goals in Africa. Initiatives, such as eGY, proclaim that this information revolution enables scientists and educators in rich and poor communities alike to share equally the benefits of ready, open access to data, information, and services. Yet poor access to the Internet remains the single most important contributor to the growing divide that is isolating African scientists from mainstream modern science, education, and training. eGYAfrica seeks to address this problem.

Scientists working in research and education institutions have few, if any, funds for better facilities and they don't make decisions about allocating government resources. But they can influence decision-makers and funding bodies through the voice of the scientific community at the local, national, and international levels.

eGYAfrica can promote communication networking among scientists and educators who share common concerns; provide links with the international scientific community and funding bodies; provide a shared information base to ensure that arguments are well-informed, and provide a forum to coordinate action at local, national, and international levels.

Steps forward

1. Expand the group of participants and supporters, both within and outside Africa, leading to the establishment of focus groups of concerned scientists in each African country. Use existing bodies and networks when possible. Groups are emerging in Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria,
2. Assemble reference information: well-informed statements about the present Internet situation, NREN developments, existing policy commitments and resolutions about reducing the digital divide, evidence of the benefits and cost-effectiveness of good Internet access, and case histories that highlight opportunities, success stories, and problems. Such information is to be used as a basis for consultation, raising awareness, and preparing arguments why governments and donors should invest in Internet facilities.
3. Collaboration with the PingER Project to measure and analyse Internet performance (response) throughout Africa.
4. Collaborate with other bodies and initiatives with related objectives - the Association of African Universities, ICSU's Regional Office for Africa, ICSU Scientific Unions, UN GAID *Global Alliance for Enhancing Access to and Application of Scientific Data in Developing Countries*, CODATA Task Groups, INASP, ICTP, eSDDC, eIFLnet, and others.
5. Engage with bodies and decision-makers to raise the profile of the needs of scientists and educators, and increase awareness of the benefits of providing better Internet services.
6. Host the eGYAfrica 2012 Workshop in Nairobi, 7-9 Nov 2012.

eGYAfrica Committee

CHUKWUMA Victor (Chair + Nigeria)	Dept Physics, Olabisi Olabanjo Univ., Ago Lwoye, Nigeria. M: +234 805 507 5270	victorchukwuma@yahoo.com ,
MEBRAHTU Alem (Secretary + Ethiopia)	Vice President for Academic, Research and Community Services, Assoc Professor of Physics Adigrat University, Mekelle, Ethiopia	alemmeb@googlemail.com ,
AMAESHI Larry	Dept. Physics, University of Lagos, Nigeria	larryamma@yahoo.co.uk ,
BAKI Paul (Kenya)	The Kenya Polytechnic University College, Dept. Technical and Applied Physics, Nairobi, Kenya	paulbaki@gmail.com
BARRY Boubakar	Coordinator, NREN Unit, Association of African Universities, Accra, Ghana	boubakarbarry@gmail.com , barry@ucad.sn ,
BARTON Charles (International Liaison)	Research School of Earth Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia	cebarton@gmail.com
COTTRELL Les (PingER Project)	PingER Project. SLAC National Accelerator Lab., Stanford, USA	cottrell@slac.stanford.edu ,
DOUMBIA Vafi (Cote d'Ivoire)	Maître de Conference, Laboratoire de Physique de l'Atmosphère, Université de Cocody, Abidjan	doumouya@ucar.edu
FOSU Collins (Ghana)	Dept. Geomatic Engineering, Kumasi National University of Science and Technology, Kumasi	fosucoll@hotmail.com
GAYE Mohamed (Senegal)	L'Université Cheikh Anta DIOP de Dakar, Senegal	mmgaye@ucad.sn ,
NYANGANYURA Daniel (Newsletter editor)	Programme Specialist: Physics, Mathematics and Engineering Sciences, ICSU Regional Office for Africa, Pretoria, South Africa	d.nyanganyura@icsu-africa.org , nyanganyura@gmail.com ,
PETITDIDIER Monique (Europe Liaison)	European Grid Initiative, CETP/CNRS, France	monique.petitdidier@latmos.ipl.fr ,
ROCHON Gilbert (USA Liaison)	Purdue University, USA	rochon@purdue.edu ,

Acronyms

CODATA	ICSU's Committee on Data for Science & Technology	http://www.codata.org/
eGY	The Electronic Geophysical Year, 2007-2008	www.egy.org
eIFL	Electronic Information for Libraries	www.eifl.net
IAGA	The International Association of Geomagnetism & Aeronomy – one of the 8 scientific Associations of IUGG	www.iugg.org/IAGA/
ICT	Information and Communications Technologies	
ICTP	International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Trieste, Italy	http://www.ictp.it/
ICSU-ROA	ICSU's Regional Office for Africa, Pretoria	www.icsu-africa.org

ICSU	The International Council for Science	http://www.icsu.org/
IHY	The International Heliophysical Year	http://ihy2007.org/
INASP	The International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications	http://www.inasp.info/
IST-Africa	Conference series run under the European Commission FP7 program for ICT in Africa	www.IST-Africa.org/Conference2009
IUGG	The International Union of Geodesy & Geophysics – one of the 30 Scientific Unions of ICSU	www.iugg.org
UN GAID	UN Global Alliance for ICT and Development	http://www.un-gaid.org/
eSDDC	UN GAID's Global Alliance for Enhancing Access to and Application of Scientific Data in Developing Countries	http://www.un-gaid.org/en/node/165

Further information

Visit: www.egy.org/egyafrika.php

eGYAfrica Secretary: Alem Mebrahtu alemmeb@yahoo.com

eGYAfrica Chairman: Victor Chukwuma VictorChukwuma@yahoo.com

International liaison: Charlie Barton charles.barton@anu.edu.au

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