# Church lacks Connection

## Africa's Access to new Information and Communication Technology is 'under Construction'

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### Some Facts

It is evident that Africa is still far from being like the rest of the world in many aspects, including media and communications and in particular in the field of new information and communication technologies (NICT). As we can easily presume, Africa has the lowest rate of Internet users, host sites and Internet Service Providers, but at the same time Africa currently shows the highest growth rate in the world. One has even started to talk about „e-business" in Africa[1]...

■      Internet users (according to Mike Jensen[2] ), the current estimates put the number of Internet users in Africa as of April 1999 at 927,985, of which 800,000 can be found in South Africa. This is in fact a tremendous growth rate of 83% in comparison to the 1997 figures! And this rapid development is still continuing...

■      Host sites: in July 1998, Africa had about 148,436 Internet host sites (140,577 of these were in South Africa) and a growth rate of 14,7% compared to 1997 (if we don't consider South Africa, the comparison shows an increase rate of 31% for the same period)

■      Providers: according to Mike Jensen, there were almost 400 Internet Service Providers (ISP) in the region by late 1998, or 300 ISPs excluding South Africa, and most of the countries in the continent, with the exception of 14 countries, had more than one ISP.[2]

Despite the growth in Internet connectivity in Africa, Internet services remained confined to capital cities, and only in some countries are the services extended to major secondary towns. Unless there is a move to extend Internet connectivity in the rural areas, the rural population will be maintained in a „new" marginalisation : this section of the population which accounts for 70 - 80 % of the total population of the continent, will remain cut off from the development of the NICT.

Of course Internet and the NICT require the availability of

■      electricity or energy supply (solar...): after a first contact and a very general knowledge on Africa, we could be well-aware that many African people don't depend on a satisfactory supply yet. Power failures are a daily experience even in the major cities in Africa, like for instance actually and for months in Nairobi or Addis Ababa.

■      specific accessories: special conditions are required to cope with dust and heat, making the price of the required equipment for Internet access higher than in European countries (stabiliser, air-conditioning, generator,...);

■       telephone lines or telecommunications means (satellite, etc.). According to statistics produced by International Telecommunication Union (ITU report 1998), Africa, with 12% of the world's population, has only 2% of the global telephone network, with a very low density coverage of less than 2 lines per 1,000 inhabitants on average (compared with 48 in Asia, 280 in America, 314 in Europe - East and West - and 520 in the European Community countries). Furthermore the telephone costs are higher in Africa than in the rest of the world...

■       computers: the price of computers is more expensive in most of the African countries than in our European countries. Furthermore in the African context, some additional accessories are required, like a stabiliser; therefore this product is not affordable to the standard living conditions of the majority of the Africans; for many of them the price of a „grand public" computer (US$ 1,000) exceeds the annual income.[3]

■       Finally Internet requires good knowledge in writing and reading... And the literacy rate in Africa remains low!

Of course, we could continue to mention and analyse constraints against the development of Internet use by the majority of the African population, making it available and accessible only to the richest section of the population. However I believe - and there are some signs in this respect - that Africa will find - and it is a current process - its own way to deal with and take advantage of Internet. Just to mention a few examples : to solve literacy problems, „modern public writers" - Internet mediators - appear in  or next to „Téléboutiques" or „Cyber Cafés": either they „write" for the people or they teach to arouse interest in the use of new technologies, using it for the people or training the ones more interested. Another example is the setting up of rural - but also urban - „telecentres" which offer community access to telephone, fax and Internet...

### Where is the Church of Africa in the Internet World?

Who in the Church is using Internet? Who has Internet connection ? And for which kind of use? Is the African Church not losing a great opportunity for communication? Recently I have been „provoked" by the Director of the „Centre Catholique pour l'Unesco" in Paris with those questions. My answer was : „We, CAMECO, could communicate via Internet (Email) with at least one person or one Church institution in each of the African countries". This is something, isn't it?

It is true that more and more Church communication ventures and centres in Africa have an Email address : radio stations, audio-visual productions units, printing presses, newspapers, communications offices at regional, national and sometimes diocesan level...; but only a few dioceses : according to the „Email directory of Africa" managed by an African fellow from Rome[4] , excluding South Africa, only 40 dioceses in Africa have one, which is less than 8%. Email service is a first step, in the sense that it simplifies the circulation of communication and contacts, and speeds the flow and circulation of information. For instance, this development supports the improvement of the Church News and Features Services („Documentation and Informations Africaines" in Kinshasa; „Africanews", „New People Features Service" or „AANA/ APTA" in Nairobi...); or some regional and national offices start to distribute their newsletters via Email (AMECEA Secretariat for instance, or the Sudan Episcopal Conference offering a „monitored news from the Arabic press"...).



*Source: Die Zeit, 27.July 2000 No.31*

Access to Internet promised!
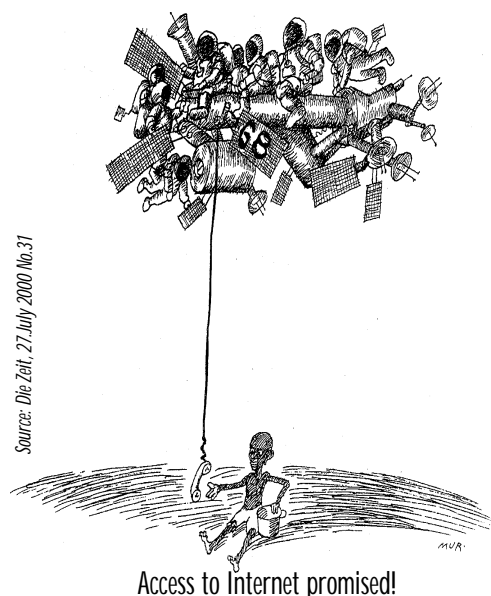
Internet Homepage for Church institutions : A few dioceses and Episcopal conferences now have their own homepages: Tanzania, Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, Cape Town archdiocese, Zambia, Niger, Cotonou in Benin, La Vie Catholique of Mauritius and Zimbabwe. However, a visit shows problems : updating of information, speed for down loading which can be dispiriting, lack of interactivity,... The Internet presence of the African Church and Church groups needs reflection as well as professional competence in particular in Webpage design and maintenance.

In this respect, and it is valid for many other aspects of the Church communication apostolate and involvement, I wonder where the „communication officers" of the Church are at panafrican level, as well as at regional and national level: are they reflecting on this issue? The question is not only about the hardware and the - financial - capacities for being equipped and connected to Internet or Church Intranet, but more fundamental in the content aspect. There is definitely an urgent need to work out some „clear ideas" and visions about the impact of the NICT on the African society and the Church in Africa, and about how the African Church wants to use them and be present in that Information World.

[1] Cf. compte-rendu de l'atelier „commerce électronique" lors de la conférence „Bamako 2000: Les passerelles du développement" sur le site „Africa'nti" du CNRS de l'Université de Bordeaux (Annie Chéneau-Loquay) : www.africa.u-bordeaux.fr/africanti/resultats/bko2000.htm

[2] Mike Jensen constantly updates information about Internet in Africa, globally and by country. His address : http://demiurge.wn.apc.org/africa/partial.html

[3] Just to give a point of comparison, according to a recent report of Reporters Sans Frontières on the Press Freedom in Ethiopia, and in July I could check and confirm those figures by myself, the monthly income of the journalists in that country is between 500 and 1000 birrs which is equivalent to 60 to 120 US$; so in that case, how could Ethiopian journalists have their own PC, although this is a daily necessity for them! According to Annie Chéneau-Loquay in Benin, the equipment needed for access to Internet (computer, modem, telephone) costs about FCFA 1,800,000.00 (FF 18,000.00 or Euro 2,750.00), in other words 9 years' salary for the average Beninese citizen; operating a mailbox costs the operator FCFA 12,000 per month while the average monthly income is about FCFA 16,000!
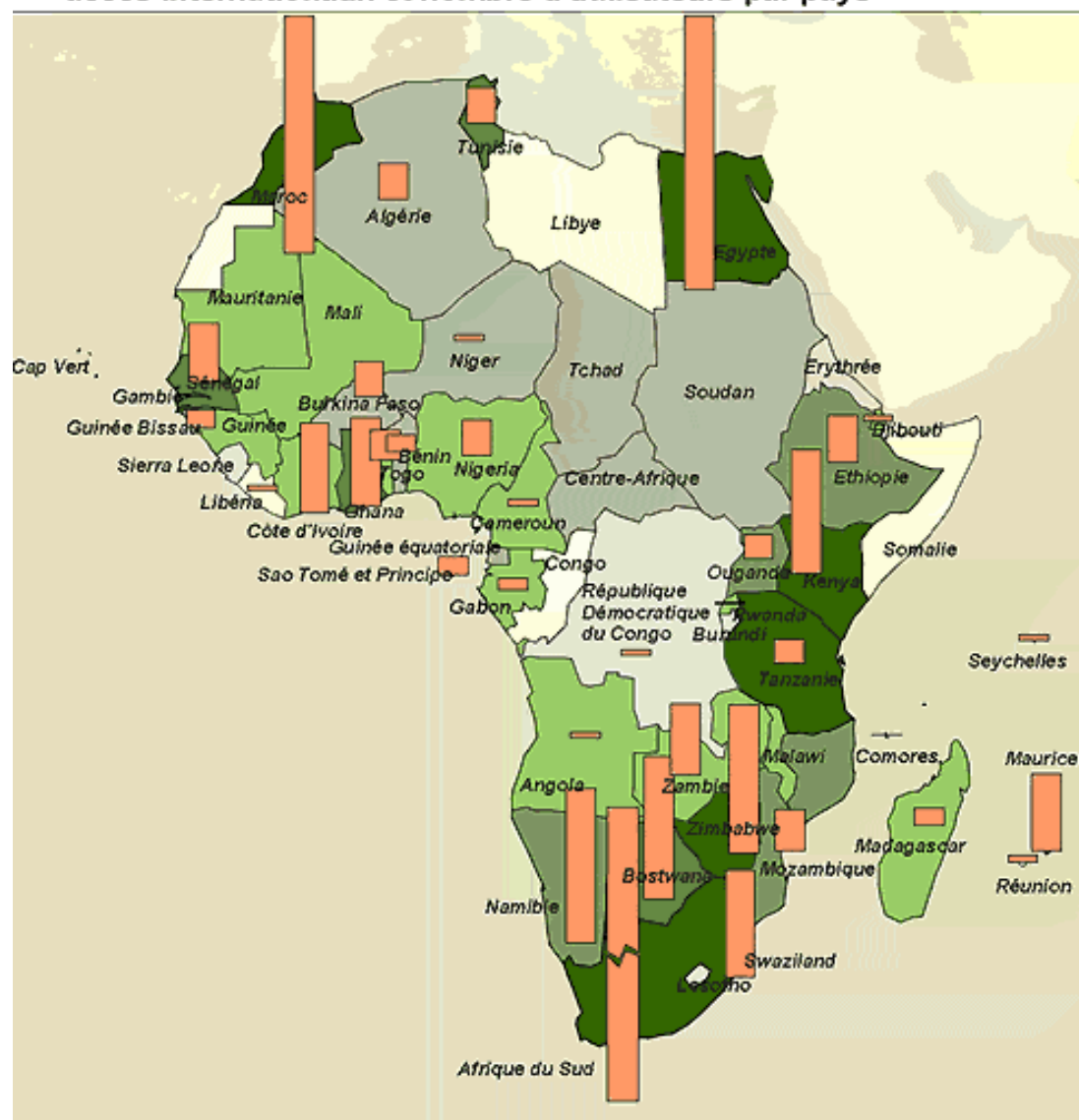
[4] compiled by J. Mutiso-Mbinda, http://www.rc.net/catholicafrica

## B O O K - R E V I E W S   —   R E C E N S I O N S   —   R E S E Ñ A S

Annie Chéneau-Loquay, "Les enjeux des technologies de la communication en Afrique: du téléphone à Internet", Editions Karthala - Regards, 2000, 406 pages, avec le Cédérom "Internet au Sud" édité par Pascal Renaud.

Cet ouvrage propose une analyse de la question des technologies de l'information et de la communication en Afrique par une vingtaine de spécialistes de disciplines différentes — sociologues, économistes, informaticiens, géographes, historiens, politologues — qui, chacun de son point de vue souligne les enjeux des NTIC pour le développement. La matière de ce livre a d'abord donné lieu à un site web, "Africa'nti" (www.regards.cnrs.fr/africanti), qui a offert ainsi une première version des lieux géographiques et de la nouvelle donne liée au déploiement des réseaux électroniques en Afrique. Les écrits regroupés à présent dans la forme papier ont été pour la plupart remaniés, à la fois pour tenir compte de l'évolution de la société de l'information en Afrique et pour être adaptés aux exigences d'un ouvrage de référence.
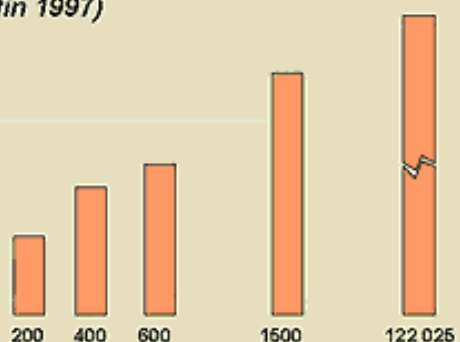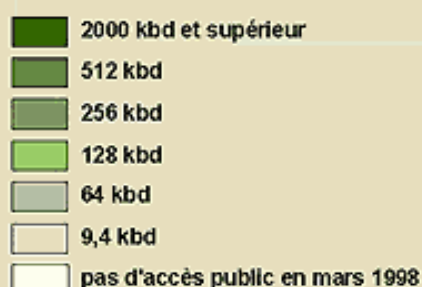
# Internet : le réseau africain en mars 1998
## accès internationaux et nombre d'utilisateurs par pays



Tunisie
Maroc
Algérie
Libye
Egypte
Mauritanie
Mali
Niger
Tchad
Soudan
Erythrée
Cap Vert
Sénégal
Gambie
Burkina Faso
Djibouti
Guinée Bissau
Guinée
Ethiopie
Sierra Leone
Bénin
Togo
Nigeria
Centre-Afrique
Somalie
Libéria
Ghana
Côte d'Ivoire
Cameroun
Guinée équatoriale
Congo
Ouganda
Kenya
Sao Tomé et Principe
Gabon
République
Démocratique
du Congo
Rwanda
Burundi
Seychelles
Tanzanie
Malawi
Comores
Maurice
Angola
Zambie
Zimbabwe
Madagascar
Bostwana
Mozambique
Réunion
Namibie
Swaziland
Lesotho
Afrique du Sud

**1. Accès nationaux à Internet (1998)**

- 2000 kbd et supérieur
- 512 kbd
- 256 kbd
- 128 kbd
- 64 kbd
- 9,4 kbd
- pas d'accès public en mars 1998

**2. Nombre de sites Internet par pays (fin 1997)**

200  400  600  1500  122 025

Sources : Mike JENSEN, 1998 et Indicateurs
des télécommunications africaines, U.I.T. 1998

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