

MID-TERM
EVALUATION

AFR/820

African Internet Exchange System/ EU-
Africa Infrastructure Trust Fund

PROJECT SUMMARY DATA

Country	54 African countries
Long project title	African Internet Exchange System / EU-Africa infrastructure Trust Fund
Short project title	Axis / EU-Africa ITF
LuxDev Code	AFR/820
Version of the Report	June 2017

RATING OF THE PROJECT BY THE EVALUATION MISSION

Global rating (Effectiveness)	3 On a scale of 1 (excellent results, significantly better than expected) to 6 (the project was unsuccessful, or the situation has deteriorated on balance)
Rating using other evaluation criteria	Relevance: 2 Efficiency: 3 Sustainability: 4

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2010: the African Internet Exchange System Project is funded by the EU-Africa Infrastructure Fund and the Government of Luxembourg. The formal approval on 19 August 2010 of the financing relates to a total amount of 5 100 000 EUR for a period of 36 months. In May 2011 the Delegation Agreement between African Union Commission and Luxembourg Development Agency for Cooperation is signed. According to the agreement the African Union Commission is assuming the full responsibility for the implementation of action described. The Project Management Unit is established in March 2011. The first Funds are transferred in October 2011. The Project Officer is recruited in May 2012 and the first Steering Committee organised in 7 May 2012 in Tanzania. The 18th September 2012 Burkina Faso welcomed the first mobilisation workshop. The project is launched.

The present and first evaluation takes place at a time of a request for a third extension by the African Union Commission. The African Union Commission has received for the execution of the action so far, 4 816 000 EUR. The financial audit for 2016 is in progress. End 2016 the account balance of the project is estimated to be 2 077 615 USD. The final balance will be confirmed by the annual audit to be done in 2017.

The evaluation mission is headed by an institutional and evaluation expert with confirmed experience in projects, with strong Information and Communication Technology components and extensive experience in Africa. A technical expert complete the mission, with confirmed experience in Information and Communication Technology and Internet Exchange Point international best practice. The field visits consisted of a meeting in Addis Ababa the Project Management Unit; in Lagos the Managing Director of IXP, the Nigeria Internet Exchange Point supported to become a Regional Internet Exchange Point for Western Africa; in Windhoek the Namibian stakeholders of the first Internet Exchange Point set up by African Internet Exchange System project. The perception of all participants to African Internet Exchange System project' workshops across the Regional Economic Communities is sought through an online survey. The survey is displayed on African Internet Exchange System project' web site with the direct emphasis of African Union Commission using the project mailing list. A General Information and Management Report to be filled was sent to the Head of the Internet Exchange Points to capture the performance indicators and the evolution of the peering traffic at the exchange points. The project documentation was reviewed and key deliverables communicated for appraisal. The mission started mid December 2016 and submitted the evaluation report beginning of March 2017.

Achievement

At end of February 2017 African Internet Exchange System project main achievements related to African Internet backbone infrastructure are:

- **14 national Internet Exchange Points** set up, out of them Gabon and Congo supported to grow as a Regional Internet Exchange Point;
- **8** prior African Internet Exchange System project **Internet Exchange Points** supported to grow as Regional Internet Exchange Points covering five African Regions.

African Internet Exchange System project has successfully seeded national Internet infrastructures reaching, at the end of 2016, a total of 33 countries in Africa with an exchange point out of 54. The association with the World Bank to fund the equipment to settle national exchange point was key to the project.

The mechanism of involvement and coordination of the regional regulators is an important intangible asset to credit African Internet Exchange System project. A dynamic is in place: Central Africa regional policy and regulatory framework endorsed, Western and Northern endorsement in progress, Southern African Development Community regional interconnection policy and East African Community cross border broadband interconnection regulations under development.

The impressive roadshow of workshops across 30 countries; the 15 regional workshops, the participation of Information and Communication Technology line ministries, regulators, academics, internet service providers and internet operators; have properly build capacity and pave the route for further initiatives.

More over the project has certainly promoted African Union Commission leaderships amongst the African Internet community.

Issues

The project was facing several major issues leading to reorganise activities, to reengineer the budget and to slowly deviate from the original approach.

Some issues caused delay in completing activities:

- Time to implement properly the project at African Union Commission and to recruit a project officer;
- The Ebola crisis and the lack of Internet Exchange Points in Central, Western and Northern African slowing down the process;
- Difficulties to obtain bank guarantee by regional internet exchange grants beneficiaries and insufficient budget for five academics programmes.

Some others led to change the original approach:

- Internet Exchange Point equipment has to be provided, implying the loss of the budget for real time monitoring system;
- Potential Regional Internet Carrier and further more Continental Internet Carrier not identified in the current African internet ecosystem, implying the breakdown of this activity;
- Regulatory obstacles and lack of cross border infrastructures implying to create a budget to develop policy and regulatory frameworks;
- Willingness of each region to own a curriculum implying to increase the original budget.

The original activities breakdown aimed to spend 63% of the grants into the regional internet infrastructure, one year operational support and its monitoring system (budget lines 20 to 22).

The current revised budgeting allocate only 32% into infrastructure through equipment for Internet Exchange Points and grants to grow as Regional Internet Exchange Point.

Improvement

There is a room of improvement at different project levels, starting with the project design.

Project design

The evaluation mission faced difficulties to assess the activities undertaken against those planned due to a lack of detailed description.

A “logical framework” in reference to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development guideline for programme design, monitoring and evaluation would have been welcomed to rapidly and efficiently understand the logic and details of the action. By default an overall work logic introduction presenting the overall approach and introducing the dependency between work packages would have addressed the same need.

The present work package description is reduced to a budget without objectively verifiable indicators of performance.

The risk table does not evaluate the impact on the budget of the risks identified. The only provision is 5% of the total budget to cater for EUR-USD exchange rates fluctuation. It's not outlined either or not the fluctuation was a risk or an opportunity.

There is no indication concerning the required size of the team, the split of roles and the description of the competences to deliver the project.

Project Governance

The steering committee chair every six months¹. The project life cycle requires monthly decision and quarterly implementation.

Such a project is building capacity across the continent, dealing with multidisciplinary aspects and discovering the field reality by deploying actions. This type of project requires an ad hoc operational organisation to build a common understanding and consensus between partners. We have not seen such a vehicle in place like monthly or at least quarterly project review, between African Union Commission and LuxDev.

Strategic Management

The vision underpinning African Internet Exchange System project is that internet is an enabler for digital delivery of government services, education, and health amongst others. But that impact has been severely curtailed, mainly by the lack of efficient paths to carry growing local and regional traffic between internet services providers.

As a consequence African Internet Exchange System project was looking to complete the “peripheral sealing” of the African Internet network with 30 new Internet Exchange Points. Having done the project would concentrate on creating regional and continental players to carry the digital delivery of services for development.

African Internet Exchange System project is half the way and face the real issue of regulation barriers, lack of cross border infrastructures, and weakness of national internet ecosystems. The project was formulated 7 years ago and naturally the strategy has to cope with a changing world and to learn while doing. The third amendment budget shows 1 millions USD spending on Policy and Regulatory and around 800k USD on Curriculum. This is not spending on creating an infrastructure asset and it should have required an explicit debate.

Result based management

Building a monitoring and evaluation system along the project delivery is not the priority of the project. The evaluation mission has understood that due to the endorsement shutting down the “Real Time Monitoring System”, all activities related to measure the results and track the performance indicators have been deprioritise. This is causing difficulties to report to the Infrastructure Trust Fund, comply with Aid for Development Governance and moreover rob the project to claim the benefits delivered.

Evaluation

At the magnitude of the African continent, facing such a diversity of regional development and dealing with an ambition to deliver 30 national Internet Exchange Point, five Regional Internet Carrier and three Continental Internet Carrier; it's not surprising that the project had to adapt the initial strategy to cope with risks and uncertainties. The evaluation mission is noticing the determination of the Project Management Unit to deliver all the headlines activities.

Considering the initial ambition, considering the initial lack of visibility of the national ecosystems and considering the issues faced, **the evaluation mission scopes the project to level 3, as having delivered “expected results but there is scope for improvement” by the end of the project.**

¹ African Internet Exchange System project Steering Committee Term of Reference

Recommendations

At end of February, based on the understanding of the project gained so far, recognising it would have been beneficial to visit a country exposed to African Internet Exchange System project without decision to set up an Internet Exchange Point, suggesting to get feedback from steering committees members and Regional Economic Communities representatives;

The evaluation mission recommends two sets of actions:

- To implement into the third amendment:
 - Establish the reason why 18 countries are not moving for Internet Exchange Point while financing is available;
 - Perform 14 Internet Exchange Points health checks to prevent a risk to stagnate or collapse;
 - Organise the monitoring and reporting of the 14 Internet Exchange Points to African Union Commission;
 - Follow up the Policy & Regulatory implementations and promote a coordinated priorities;
 - Reengineer the budget for curriculum to perform the actions above;
 - Produce half yearly Financial Reporting reflecting the activities breakdown.
- To implement into an extension of African Internet Exchange System project:
 - Identified strategic countries and geographical to build on African Internet Exchange System project;
 - Forecast a budget for the setup of new Internet Exchange Points and growth to Regional Internet Exchange Points;
 - Support Internet Exchange Point's plan for development integrated in national strategies including cyber security;
 - Animate an African Internet Exchange System project' community to stimulate the dissemination of best practice,
 - Turn Internet Exchange Points into Cluster Managers and Information and Communication Technology innovation Labs;
 - Actively harmonise and align aid and actions of donors for Internet Exchange Points and Regional Internet Exchange Points.