

REPORT ON SLREN STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

25-26 April 2016
Njala University, Sierra Leone

Prepared by
Thomas Philip Songu

ICT Director, Njala University/
Interim CEO, SLREN

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Document Revision History

Name	Revision Date	Version	Reason for Change
Thomas Songu	28-04-2016	0.1	Initial draft based
Memunatu Pratt	03/05/2016	0.2	Updated with review comments

Introduction

Njala University in collaboration with the Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) and the Ministry of Information & Communication (MIC) with support from the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) recently hosted a stakeholders' workshop on 25-26 April 2016 at Njala University, Njala Campus, Sierra Leone. The purpose of the workshop was to engage key stakeholders in research and education, including Vice Chancellors & Principals, Researchers, ICT Directors/Managers, Ministries and Departments and Agencies (MDAs), donor agencies in Sierra Leone and the West and Central Africa Research and Education Network (WACREN) Chief Executive Officer regarding the establishment of a National Research and Education Network in Sierra Leone (SLREN) and to discuss the need for Sierra Leone joining the West and Central African Research and Education Network (WACREN). The aim is to secure high speed and affordable Internet connectivity for the Sierra Leone research and education community in Gb/s rather than in Kb/s.

This document provides a report on the workshop, highlighting the background, purpose of the conference, the topics covered, lessons learnt, and actions agreed.

Background

Education, cutting-edge research, data supply and demand, science and technology are the key ingredients of sustainable social and economic development. Building a strong education and research community is a cornerstone for prosperity, societal development, stability and regional integration. Information and communication technologies underpin research and education and the creation of an innovations and solutions for life-long learning and continuing education-. Education and research institutes/bodies or consortiums possess a community of scholars, researchers, engineers, technicians and firms engaged in production of knowledge goods and services. Academic and research networking is highly regarded as an essential national infrastructure, 'public goods comparable to roads, water, ports and energy services due to its implications on learning, teaching, research and many other scientific endeavours that have positive impact on the knowledge economy, general economic development and social cohesion.

A high performance national network connecting academic and research institutions and popularly termed a National Research and Education Network (NREN) is increasingly viewed as a vital component of modern teaching, research and learning. About a hundred countries in the world have adopted the NREN as the centrepiece of their information and communication technology (ICT) plan for tertiary education institutions and for connecting research institutes and other institutions such as schools and hospitals. Within each continent, continental level Research and Education Networks (RENs) have been set up to implement and operate the regional networks that interconnect the NRENs. It also connects to each other, making researchers inter-connected as part of a global research and education community. These include GÉANT in Europe; Canary in Canada; Internet 2 and NLR in the USA; CLARA in South America. Similar regional RENs exist in the former USSR; Asia; the UbuntuNet Alliance within the Eastern and Southern belts of Africa, and the West and Central African Research and Education Network, WACREN for West and Central Africa.

Justification

Sierra Leone is one of the countries in Africa and globally that is poorly interconnected to its education and research communities. This possesses a very huge challenge to its development efforts especially with the passing of the Right to Access Information Act or freedom of information law and the global demand for Sierra Leone to be part of the Open Data Drive and academic and research roles in ICT development. In addition, universities still lag behind the provision of internet connectivity for staff and students in promoting teaching, learning and research; it is against this backdrop that the SLREN is proposed to be established in creating a part way for widening regional and global education and research ICT networks and communities

Purpose of the Workshop

The purpose of the 2 day workshop was to firstly, develop a common vision and understanding of the roles of key stakeholders in creating a platform for raising the awareness of the need for establishing SLERN. and secondly, to discuss and agree on a work plan that will guide the establishment of the SLREN and to brief senior administrators, academics, researchers and donor institutions in outlining the modalities for NREN and the need for Sierra Leone to be part of the WACREN.

Objectives

Specifically the workshop objectives are:

- Engagement of key stakeholders in Sierra Leone, including Vice Chancellors, Principals, Senior academics, Researchers in tertiary institutions and donor agencies in Sierra Leone and the WACREN leadership regarding the establishment of a National Research and Education Network in Sierra Leone (SLREN) and
- Sierra Leone to join the West and Central African Research and Education Network (WACREN).
- Engage with INASP and WACREN to approach international donor and partner institutions, including the Association of African Universities (AAU), the European Union and the World Bank to facilitate the establishment the Sierra Leone Research and Education Network (SLREN).

Expected Deliverables:

The following are expected outcomes from the workshop:

- Hold a stakeholder workshop on 25-26 April 2016
- Adopt a declaration on the formation of SLREN and signed by the high profile government officials and all heads of research and educational institutions
- Appointment of the Interim Committee to register and manage the SLREN
- Set clear vision on how to interrelate with the various research and educational institutions; Timeline for the registration of the SLREN and the development of the full project proposal and seek pledges from sponsor/donor community
- Financial report, with receipts for all costs within 4 weeks of completion of the event
- Narrative report within 4 weeks of completion of the event

- Follow-up report on the action plan within 3 to 6 months after the SLREN workshop
- Participate in any follow up impact assessment/case study
- Allow access to any materials developed in relation to this activity if requested

Topics covered

The programme and topics covered during the workshop are detailed in Annex A.

The organisers set the theme for the Stakeholder workshop as: **“Closing the Digital Divide in Sierra Leone Tertiary Education: The Case of National Research and Education Network”**. Some participants were invited to present on core topics that are interesting and relevant to research and education networking:

Plenary Session I: Opening Session

This session highlighted the following:

- Introductions and Welcome remarks from the Registrar, Njala University
- Welcome address from the Vice Chancellor & Principal, Njala University
- Welcome remarks from the Vice Chancellor & Principal, University of Sierra Leone
- Goodwill messages (2 minutes each) - World Bank, UN, USL, MMCET, Eastern Polytechnic, Tobman University, SALCAB
- Speech from Minister of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in Sierra Leone or Representative
- Speech from Minister of Information & Communications (MIC) in Sierra Leone or Representative
- Keynote address from CEO of the West & Central Africa Research & Education Network (WACREN)

Session 2: The NREN as a Tool for National Development

This session focused the NREN as a tool for National development

- Fiber Optic Broadband Connectivity: An overview of current fiber optic broadband implementation in Sierra Leone and its relevant to national Development
- Fiber Optic Broadband Cost Model: Access and Affordability/Tariffs
- Closing the Digital Divide in Sierra Leone Tertiary & Research Institutions: The Case for a National Research & education Network (SLREN)
- The role of ICT in the UN Sustainable Development Goals for achieving Quality Education in Sierra Leone

The following issues were discussed during the plenary session:

1. Status of University Funding with regards provision of ICTs
2. SALCAB cost of services
3. The role of the Ministry of Information and Communication
4. The high costs of building the campus infrastructure for connectivity
5. Cost sharing proposal for funding
5. ICT support for universities governance and management of administrative and academic services

5. The Intellectual property rights, FOI and its effects on the education and research communities
6. Commitments from the World Bank and WACREN

Outcomes of the workshop

- Higher education and research institutions in Sierra Leone very passionate about the formation of the SLREN
- The Universities and research institutions in Sierra Leone should take the lead for the establishment of the SLREN
- Government support, through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and the Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) is as essential as member buy-in and commitment. The Government of Sierra Leone (GSL) should therefore regard the establishment of the SLREN as a national asset to be fostered and supported by central contributions to a hybrid funding model. In this way they will benefit industry and ultimately their citizens generally.
- The Universities, in consultation with the relevant ministries (i.e. MEST, MIC) should seek funding from donor/partner institutions (including the Association of African Universities (AAU), the European Union (EU), and the World Bank for the establishment of the SLREN
- The SLREN should be a financially sustainable organization that serves the ICT needs of the research and education institutions in Sierra Leone
- The SLREN do indeed to occupy a special position outside the commercial Internet market. SLREN should operate as not-for-profit organisations serving a closed user group and consequently there is a case for them to be designated as non-public networks.

Key Actions / Next steps

The following key actions /next steps were agreed:

- a) Stakeholder declaration adopted for the establishment of the SLREN
- b) An Interim Steering Committee appointed to oversee the formation of SLREN and to report back within 3 months after the workshop.
- c) The ICT Director, Njala University, Mr. Thomas Songu, appointed to manage the establishment of the SLREN with oversight from the Interim Steering Committee
- d) To establish effective communication and advocacy to reach out to research and educational institutions, communities of practice and policy makers implemented.
- e) The Interim CEO and Steering Committee should work with the WACREN leadership to develop modalities to register the SLREN as a non-profit making organisation and for Sierra Leone to join the WACREN community
- f) Sustainable funding options for SLREN should be agreed at the Council of Vice Chancellors and Principals meeting. The Vice Chancellor & Principal of the University of Sierra Leone to take a lead on this.
- g) Interim CEO with support from the Steering Committee to liaise with the Ministry of Information and Communication, and the Sierra Leone Cable Company (SALCAB) to pilot and rollout fiber optic broadband in order to provide a reliable broadband backbone network for all tertiary and research institutions in Sierra Leone
- h) Develop proposal and approach government and donor agencies for funding

ANNEX A: SLREN Workshop Programme

Monday, 25 April 2016		
17:00 – 21:00	Arrival of delegates	
19:00 - 21:00	Meet and Greet Cocktail	
Tuesday, 26 April 2016		
08:30 – 09:00	Registration	
09:00 – 09:30	Plenary Session I: Opening Session <i>Master of Ceremonies: Madam Memunatu Pratt (Department of Peace & Conflict Studies, USL)</i>	
Time	Activity	Presenter
09:00 – 09:10	Call to order – Introductions and Welcome remarks from the Registrar, Njala University	Mr. Aly Turay
09:10 – 09:20	Welcome address from the Vice Chancellor & Principal, Njala University	Prof Ernest T Ndomahina
09:20 – 09:30	Welcome remarks from the Vice Chancellor & Principal, University of Sierra Leone	Prof Ekundayo Thompson
09:30 – 09:45	Goodwill messages (2 minutes each): World Bank, UN, USL, MMCET, Eastern Polytechnic, Tobman University, SALCAB	Representatives
09:45 – 10:00	Speech from Minister of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in Sierra Leone or Representative	Hon Dr. Minkilu Bah or Representative
10:00 - 10:15	Speech from Minister of Information & Communications (MIC) in Sierra Leone or Representative	Hon Mohamed Bangura or Representative
10:15 – 10:40	Keynote address from CEO of the West & Central Africa Research & Education Network (WACREN)	Prof. Baubakar Barry
10:40 – 11:00	Health break / Group Photos	
11:00 – 13:00	Session 2: The NREN as a Tool for National Development <i>Chairperson: Andaleeb Jahan Alam, World Bank Country Representative</i> <i>Rapporteur: Daniel Kanu, Commissioner, Right to Access Information Commission</i>	
11:00 – 11:20	Fiber Optic Broadband Connectivity: An overview of current fiber optic broadband implementation in Sierra Leone and its relevant to national Development (12+8 min)	Mohamed Jalloh, e-governance Coordinator, Ministry of Information & Communication
11:00 – 11:20	Fiber Optic Broadband Cost Model: Access and	Mohamed Sheriff,

	Affordability/Tariffs (12+8 min)	MD Sierra Leone Cable Company (SALCAB)
11:20 – 11:40	Closing the Digital Divide in Sierra Leone Tertiary & Research Institutions: The Case for a National Research & education Network (SLREN)	Thomas Songu, ICT Director Njala University
11:40 – 12:00	The role of ICT in the UN Sustainable Development Goals for achieving Quality Education in Sierra Leone (12+8 min)	<i>Dr. Gabriel Regalema,, UN Country Representative</i>
12:00 – 13:00	Tour of Fiber optic Point of Presence – Njala Campus. (1 hour)	ALL
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 15:30	Session 3: SLREN Implementation Roadmap <i>Chairperson: Prof, Ekundayo Thompson, Vice-Chancellor & Principal, USL</i> <i>Rapporteur: Prof. Miriam Conteh-Morgan, Librarian, IPSM, USL</i>	
14:00 – 14:30	Appointment of the interim SLREN Management team: - the BOARD - The CEO	
14:30 – 14:45	Resolutions /Pledges from sponsor/donor community - (30 min)	MEST & MIC /World Bank/EU/UNDP/ SLREN Members
14:45 – 15:00	Closing Remarks	Professor Gbamanja Deputy Vice Chancellor, FBC

ANNEX B: INTERIM COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Refer to attachment

ANNEX C: SLREN STAKEHOLDER DECLARATION

Refer to attachment

ANNEX D: SLREN WORKPLAN

Refer to attachment

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