

National Research and Education Network (NREN) Implementation in WACREN Zone: A Comparative Study

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become important tools for offering quality higher education and facilitating world-class research. Nowadays, countries and institutions recognize that research and education networks are essential components of national infrastructures. A National Research and Education Network (NREN) is a high performance communication network owned and operated for and by the education and research community of a country and the organization that operates that network is constituted as a consortium of members, a dedicated agency, a company, an NGO, or other types of organisational body. Several countries around the world have adopted the NREN as the centrepiece of an advanced network for collaboration and communication between the Tertiary and Research Institutions within their country and to other parts of the world. Africa remains the most under-served continent in terms of the information and communication technologies. Hence, the collaboration amongst tertiary education institutes in Africa is imperative to make them the key actors in the enhancement of information and communication technologies for the society.

In Mali many efforts have been made to interconnect higher intuitions of education and research (HIE/IR) to facilitate research and improve education quality. In 2012, Mali Research and Education Network was established as an association by HIE and RI under the name MaliREN. PAES (Support Program for Higher Education of UNESCO and Support Program for ICT Development in Higher Education of UEMOA) were two initiatives of NREN implementation in Mali. However, none of the two initiatives represented a true NREN. In 2015, the world bank Project to support higher education in Mali known as PADES realised the importance of MaliREN and thus has paid its 20% counterpart in AfricaConnect2 project of European Union which equals to \$360 000 . Furthermore, PADES paid MaliREN membership fees to WACREN and mandated an expert to develop a Business Plan for MaliREN which was validated in 2016. MaliREN is yet to be operational. The challenges include among others the interconnection of research and education institutions and the interconnection of that Intranet to WACREN network.

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