IMPROVING QUALITY EDUCATION & RESEARCH CAPACITY THROUGH ADVANCED ICT SERVICES: LESSONS OF NREN IMPLEMENTATION IN SIERRA LEONE

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Introduction

- Sierra Leone is one of the countries in Africa and globally that is poorly interconnected to its education and research communities.

- There is the vital need to develop high-quality ICT infrastructure and access to research resources to help equip researchers and policymakers to tackle their countries’ needs.

- The Sierra Leone Research & Education Network (SLREN) was established in July 2016 to champion NREN activities.
SLREN – Story Board

- **November 2015 in Maputo, Mozambique: UbuntuNet Conference**
  - First thoughts on establishment of a NREN in Sierra Leone
- **March 2016 in Dakar, Senegal: WACREN 2016 Conference**
  - Further networks and discussions for Sierra Leone joining the WACREN community
- **April 2016 in Njala University: SLREN Stakeholder workshop**
  - Meeting with WACREN leadership, Ministries, Vice-Chancellors & Principals, telecom providers, academics in Sierra Leone & Liberia and donor community
  - The Njala declaration for the formation of SLREN adopted
  - Interim Committee setup to facilitate the formation of SLREN within 3 months
- **July 2016: SLREN 2016 Conference**
  - SLREN formally registered as a non-profit making
  - SLREN officially inaugurated
To develop high-quality ICT infrastructure and services for the benefit of Sierra Leonean higher education and research institutions
Our Challenges

- Large gap in terms of Digital divide
- Inadequate flow of educational and research content to universities,
- Not flexible in terms of location and schedule for both teacher and student
- Inadequate research activities / underdeveloped research infrastructure,
- Limited interaction between academic and research community, industry and government,
- Limited regional cooperation and collaboration in sharing knowledge between researchers, teachers and educators
- Lack of technical expertise and visionary capability
Progress made so far!

1. Building relationships – mobilization and collaborations with development partners and change movers – UbuntuNet, WACREN, INASP, the World Bank…
2. Stakeholder engagement and commitment – SLREN 2016 Conference with policy makers (Government), Academics, ICT & Library staff
3. Strong NREN membership base established – all tertiary & research institutions, schools
4. NREN established and registered as non-profit making
5. Commitments from World Bank & Government to connect all universities & selected schools to the fiber optic by March 2017
6. Symposia for academic leadership, creating a skilled pool of researchers, journals editors and e-resources access and use – Agora, Hinari, etc.
Next Steps

- Finalise SLREN business case & seek funding from government, members and donor agencies
- Collaborate with World Bank, MIC, & SALCAB to rollout fibre optic broadband connectivity to Universities and Schools
- Securing counter-funding for participation in AfricaConnect2
- Engage WACREN, AfricaConnect 2 to agree roadmap for connecting SLREN to the WACREN network infrastructure
- Embark on ongoing projects with INASP – Library Consortium, ICT infrastructure, E-resources /Online Journal publishing
- Keeping the momentum - public sensitisation / awareness about SLREN across higher education and the research community in Sierra Leone
Key points of Learning

1. Involvement of dynamic and committed people is vital for NREN success.
2. Seek relationships with stakeholders from start to understand their priorities
3. Bring together ICT experts, researchers, higher education representatives and librarians from the beginning to develop a shared vision
4. Adopt sustainable funding model to ensure delivery of quality ICT services
5. Embark on capacity building for ICT staff, librarians and researchers
6. Work with role models as a development example.
7. Step back as soon as there are signs of local ownership, and entrusting the NREN’s sustainability to local knowledge and talent.
THANK YOU

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