

Is there **LIFE** beyond the **United Nations**?

As was reported previously, the Department of Economics at the University of Pretoria secured a grant from the United Nations to initiate and execute an economic policy analysis programme for 15 countries in southern, central and western Africa: Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Senegal, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The aim of the project is to enhance the capacity of policy makers in African countries to formulate and implement development policies utilising internationally accepted policy-analysis techniques and economic modelling. The goal is to empower decision-makers to examine policy alternatives and forecast the economic performance of their countries under alternative policy scenarios. A final objective is to integrate the network of African models with Project LINK – an international multi-country model of more than 70 national and international economic research institutes and organisations, which will ensure the globalisation of the fully functional African network.

The implementation of the project includes five workshops, which are scheduled over a period of two years (2000 – 2002). The workshops combine:

- Formal training in advanced technical aspects of econometric modelling, policy analysis and forecasting, developing, upgrading and maintenance of social databases, as well as hardware and software application;
- individual and group sessions with the international consultants;
- participation in annual meetings;
- policy dialogues; and
- conferences to exchange national experiences between modellers and to interact with policy makers.

The project utilises UN in-house expertise, international consultancy assistance from Canada and the United Kingdom and, to a great extent, local expertise.

The first four workshops have been very successful and greatly appreciated by all participants, as can be seen from the quote below:

"... the progress in model building has been extremely satisfactory so that the majority of the participants are now able to continue adjusting the national models with the minimum assistance. Our confidence in the excellent quality of the project implementation convinced us to redistribute staff travel funds in favour of sponsoring participation of ten selected African delegates from the project in the Project LINK Spring Link meeting. We believe that such participation will result in integration of the African network into the global network of econometric modellers."

Dr Ian Kinniburgh, Director: Department of Social and Economic Analysis, United Nations

With a final wrap-up workshop to be held from 28 October to 1 November, the project



Prof Charlotte du Toit,
Executive coordinator:
Research Network for
Development Policy Analysis.

has already matured into an independent network of expertise in Africa and satisfies the ultimate goal of ownership and sustainability. The expertise of the network can now be applied to improve co-ordinated policy analysis on a regional basis, allowing policy makers to evaluate the impact of world economic conditions on the regional economy and their country. It therefore supports the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), since it is the grass-roots implementation of the African dream towards the realisation of an African Union.

Huge interest and commitment has already been shown by a number of multilateral organisations in Africa to support the extension of the initiative with the aim of including more countries and in doing so, broadening the base of economic modelling expertise. Negotiations are currently underway to secure a life after the UN.

Finally, it has to be acknowledged that none of this would have been possible without not only the financial support of the sponsor, Department of Social and Economic Analysis (DESA), United Nations, but the dedicated efforts and personal contributions of the DESA personnel, in particular Ada Samuelsson (UN project manager) and Carl Gray (official UN representative).