Address by Ambassador Zina Andrianarivelo-Razafy, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Madagascar to the United Nations, at the VII Infopoverty World Conference

United Nations, New York, 20 April 2007

Mr. Chairman, Ambassador Lorenzo, distinguished delegates of the Infopoverty Conference and friends,

I would like to congratulate the co-organizers of the VII Infopoverty World Conference for selecting the theme "Towards a Social Use of the ICTs at the Service of the Millennium Development Goals". My brief presentation will focus on the experiences of Madagascar to establish the first ICT Village and the key role played by public - private partnerships to make it happen.

As you are aware, Madagascar is the first pilot country of the UN Public-Private Alliance for Rural Development or UN Alliance approved by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2004. This ECOSOC initiative emanated from the 2003 Ministerial Declaration of the Council that called on global partners in promoting partnerships for rural development. The Government works closely with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA) for its implementation.

A rural village, Sambaina, located one hour from the capital city was selected to establish the ICT Village. This project was started with a successful partnership between the New York based NGO, Non-Profit Computing NPC Inc , the Rotary Clubs of New York and the Province of Antananarivo in Madagascar. The NPC donated 483 pre-owned working computers to the Province of Antananarivo, some of which were given to the Village of Sambaina. The objective of the project was to provide technical assistance to bridge the digital divide between rural and urban local authorities and schools while providing the first computers for the villagers. The impact of this partnership was that the local administration now works faster.

The next phase was to transform the ICT Village of Sambaina into Madagascar's ICT Model Village. This brought more partners such as the University of Oklahoma (USA) and the Italian NGO "Observatory for Cultural and Audiovisual Communication in the Mediterranean and in the World (OCCAM)". Other stakeholders of this project included universities, private companies, and the civil society.

This project aims at creating a model of sustainable development that fights poverty at the community level through appropriate use of ICTs and new technologies. The initiative is based on the project OCCAM has developed in the framework of the Infopoverty Programme as follow up to the Tunis Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The process of implementation and replication was then started in the ICT Village of Sambaina in 2005.

As of today, the ICT project has generated a number of activities:

(i)   digital classroom: Currently more than 600 students aged 11 to 15 are regularly trained in order to accelerate the digital literacy of the community and create new jobs. The project has also been extended to the neighbouring community of Ankadimanga;

The President of Madagascar, H.E Marc RAVALOMANANA, a strong supporter of the ICT Village project, inaugurated the digital classroom on November 2005.

(ii) new community resource accessible to all: In 2005, the Sambaina community built a cyber-room in the town hall, with support from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Telecommunications and the Ministry of Health. The Centre is the first nucleus of intervention and enjoys the direct participation of the community, which can use ICTs to solve many concrete problems and be part of an innovation which is shared and not imposed. Now students, farmers, job seekers, and virtually all members of the community can come and learn basic digital literacy in classes with 6 computers at their disposal 8 hours per day. The Centre also encourages the villagers to broaden their perspectives through the use of technologies such as e-commerce, for example.

(iii)   health presidium: to improve the health infrastructure in two areas – the Basic Health Centre of Sambaina and the Basic Health Center of neighboring Ankadimanga – computer facilities were provided. And a refurbished health presidium was equipped for pregnant women and newborn children.

(iv)   telemedicine has been introduced. Those remote areas can now have access to shared and distant medical expertise. The services delivered include diagnosis, prescriptions, special services for pregnant women, newborn and disabled people.

(v)   From an administrative point of view, computerization has helped the health centres to achieve savings or gains through the use of much less paper and through increased productivity.

But now that the Community Centre has been refurbished and endowed with basic ICT appliances, connectivity is a key element to link the Centre to the rest of the world and is a fundamental prerequisite to provide all services in the next phases of the project.

In 2006, the UN Alliance and OCCAM were able to secure a new partnership with an European satellite provider Skylogic Eutelsat Communications that offered to donate one year of free satellite internet service to the ICT Village.

In June 2006, the Government of Madagascar and the UN Alliance invited Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the UN Millennium Project and Mr. Pierpaolo Saporito, President of OCCAM, to establish projects for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. At this meeting with the Government, they designated the Village of Sambaina to be the first Madagascar Millennium Village project in the country. The promoters, UN Millennium Project and the Earth Institute at Columbia University, will support this project in collaboration with UNDP. It is a "bottom up" approach to lift villages out of poverty.

I must particularly mention the financial contribution of the Government of South Korea to implement the Millennium Village at Sambaina. Work on this project is carried out under the leadership of Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute, Columbia University.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to share some experiences and lessons learned for the success of the Public-Private Partnership Project:

- It is important to have strong national leadership, preferably at the highest level;
- To promote the concept of "Ownership" and "Partnerships" at the village and the country levels,
- To emphasize the Alliance-Madagascar's role in the mobilization of public-private partnership at the local level; and
- The mobilization by the UN Alliance and the Alliance-Madagascar of development partners at the global levels.

Projects such as the ICT Village Model will help rural development which receives a top priority in the recently launched Madagascar Action Plan (MAP).

To conclude, I must say that the overall result of the public-private partnerships in Madagascar has been a win-win situation.

Madagascar wishes to expand and replicate this promising model throughout the island with its 22 administrative regions, and we hope to get further support from international development partners.

Thank you for your attention.

****

Source: Permanent Mission of Madagascar to the United Nations, New York and UN-DESA/OESC