

A local platform for international participation

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The African Centre of Excellence for information Ethics (ACEIE), housed by the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria, was officially established in May 2012. Its purpose is to formally reflect on the activities relating to, and history of information ethics in Africa. This reflection should contribute to research on the topic and allow networking with other academics in the field. Since its establishment, the Centre has made good progress in meeting its objectives.

When the memorandum of agreement (MoA) was signed between the Department of Communications (DoC) and the University of Pretoria on 15 December 2011, six objectives were agreed upon. Each activity has to answer to one or more of the six objectives. Apart from the general office duties and research projects that have to be an ongoing endeavour of the ACEIE, it also has to contribute to the body of knowledge of information ethics on local and international levels. Two of the objectives are of specific relevance in this regard:

- **Objective 1: Development of information societies:**
To create an awareness of the importance of information in different communities and among responsible persons and information practitioners, in terms of where to access information and how to overcome inequalities in access to information, how to integrate it, and to create an awareness of society's dependence on information.
- **Objective 6: Internationalisation of information ethics policies and practices:**
To promote key proposals and research, as agreed, concerning the research on information ethics and its application, for consideration within African and international intergovernmental organisations, such as the African Union (AU), African regional communities and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Based on these two objectives, the ACEIE has proceeded to engage with international role players on four levels:

- The design and rollout of an information ethics curriculum across universities in Africa
- Meetings with relevant stakeholders
- Interaction with the UNESCO National Commission offices in the southern African region
- Workshops and conferences at universities across Africa

Good progress has been made with the development of the information ethics curriculum. The first workshop in this regard took place at the University of Pretoria in July 2011, and hosted participants from Germany, the USA, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa. The framework for the curriculum was created at this workshop, and the first draft was made available to the universities concerned by November 2011 to allow them to start implementing the curriculum.

The second workshop took place in Nairobi, Kenya, in July 2012 and specifically addressed the information ethics issues concerning social media. By raising their concerns, the participants could address the content requirements of the curriculum to make it even more relevant for universities and individuals already experiencing problems and opportunities with social media. This workshop experience was further developed into a conference theme – “The cheetah generation’s fast track to social media” – for the third International African Network for Information Ethics (ANIE) conference on information ethics. At this conference, held in South Africa in September 2012, the participants of the Kenyan workshop presented their research on the information ethics concerns of social media. The pre-conference workshop further elaborated on the curriculum content.



→ *The ANIE Pre-conference Workshop was held at the LAICO Regency Hotel in Kenya on 3 June 2012.*



→ *On request of UNESCO, the ACEIE conducted workshops in Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia (above) and Swaziland (below).*



In July 2013, the ACEIE team visited Kampala, Uganda, where a fourth workshop was hosted together with Makerere University. This workshop predominantly involved academia from universities across Uganda, but participants from Tanzania and Kenya were also present. This workshop further extended participation to include the African Centre of Cyber Law and Cyber Crime Prevention (ACCP) and the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI). The next African workshop took place in Zanzibar, Tanzania, in October 2013. This involved academia from both the mainland and the island. The Minister of Trade, Industry and Marketing provided further support for this event, as well as for the process of raising awareness on the topic of information ethics. One of the results of this workshop was the second draft of the information ethics curriculum, which was subsequently distributed.

After extensive research and revision by the curriculum specialist, Dr Beverley Malan, and the Director of the ACEIE, Coetzee Bester, the third draft of the information ethics curriculum was presented at the fifth information ethics workshop in Kampala, Uganda, in January 2014. Makerere University hosted this event and included academia from across Uganda. The final product of all the information ethics curriculum research was formally launched at the fourth international ANIE conference in July 2014, which was once again hosted in Kampala, Uganda.

The ACEIE collaborated with UNESCO and other organisations in a number of meetings. It was invited by UNESCO to address and participate in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) session that addressed the current and emerging ethical and societal challenges of the information society, which took place on 26 February 2013 as part of the WSIS+10 review meeting in Paris. The theme of the event was "Knowledge societies for peace and sustainable development".



→ The African workshop in Tanzania (above and below) resulted in the second draft of the Information Ethics curriculum.



→ The ACEIE team visited Kampala, Uganda, in July 2013. (Photograph: Maxwekk Omwenga.)

Following the event in February 2013, the ACEIE also attended the 37th UNESCO General Conference in Paris, France, in November 2013, where the Centre participated in interpreting the draft resolution for Major Programme V – sustaining peace and development through freedom of expression and access to knowledge. Activities focused on Strategic Objective 9 (promoting freedom of expression, media development and access to information and knowledge). The ACEIE worked on Strategic Objective 9 (UNESCO Document 37 C/5 – Volume 1 – Draft Resolutions), particularly 13 focus areas and two main lines of action that will guide activities and reports for the period 2014 to 2017. The aim of this was to analyse the content of the documents on Strategic Objective 9 and to explore the content in terms of the African milieu, traditions and background. The ACEIE presented practical details for implementation project proposals to the UNESCO Director-General in achieving Strategic Objective 9 in Africa.

During 2013, the ACEIE actively participated in the activities of SA Natcom, the communication and information sector and other Africa-based UNESCO structures to achieve the related UNESCO and WSIS objectives. The Africa-based activities included a number of projects of the UNESCO southern African region. On 28 and 29 April 2014, the ACEIE addressed the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office in southern Africa in Harare, Zimbabwe, during a joint consultative meeting of UNESCO national commissions in southern Africa. It led to a UNESCO request to the ACEIE to conduct further workshops in Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland.

International cooperation is important for achieving the aims of the Centre. The conferences that have been held and the projects that have been initiated have led to the ACEIE collaborating on various issues with local, African and overseas universities. This has resulted in research projects and publications in accredited journals. ➡