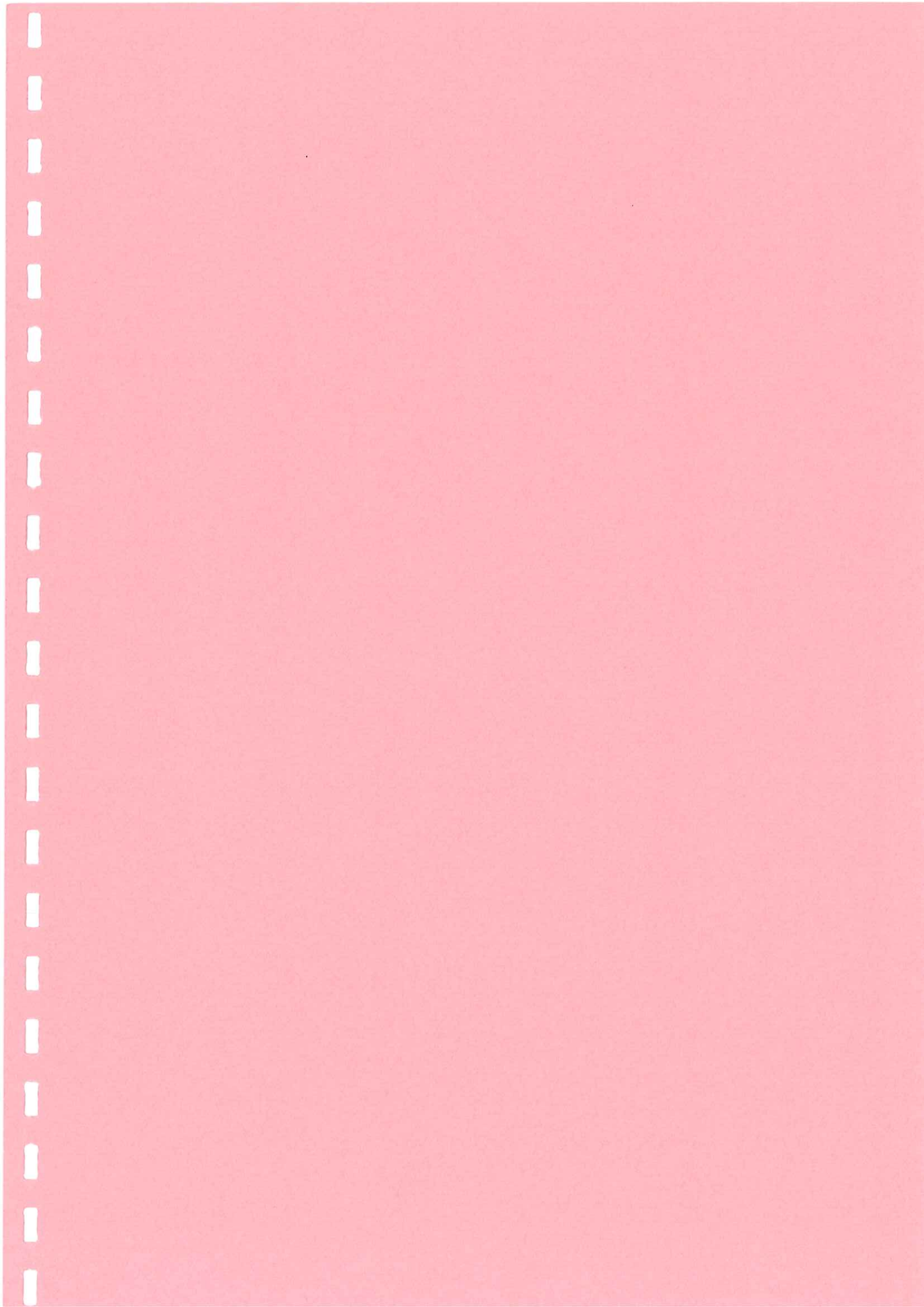# Africa Information Ethics & e-Government
Workshop & Seminar

23 – 27 FEBRUARY 2009

MOUNT GRACE - MAGALIESBURG
SOUTH AFRICA

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Workshop on Information Ethics and e-Government in Africa

Introduction

The first ever Africa Information Ethics (IE) Conference held in February 2007 in Pretoria, South Africa, was conceived and planned as part of the implementation of Action Line C10 of the Geneva Plan of Action. Based on the experience and input of the participants in this Conference, we have identified several areas of potential cooperation with UNESCO to not only put the outcomes of the Conference into effect, but also to put them into the international context facilitated by UNESCO. It is for us absolutely vital to foster the process we started, or it will lose momentum and Africa will remain underrepresented in the ongoing international and intercultural dialogue on social, ethical and legal issues of the Knowledge and Information Society.

Information ethics and e-government in Africa

One of the main manifestations of the Knowledge and Information Society is the establishment of e-government systems and services. The WSIS Declaration and Action Plan, for example, expressed the need for governments to implement e-government systems to facilitate administrative activities and deliver services to their citizens. Africa has embarked on the e-government road with many e-government projects, and NEPAD (The New Partnership for Africa's Development) has launched an e-government initiative urging African governments to implement e-government projects. E-government has, therefore, become an important goal in Africa, and countries including South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria and Mauritius have invested in e-government projects and the training of people to implement these projects.

During the Pretoria conference, it became evident that little attention has been given to the ethical dimensions associated with the implementation of e-government in Africa. The critical success factors for implementation of e-government in Africa centred mostly on the following infrastructural questions (Heeks, 2002):

- Is the data systems infrastructure ready?
- Is the legal infrastructure ready?
- Is the institutional infrastructure ready?
- Is the human infrastructure ready?
- Is the technological infrastructure ready?
- Is the leadership infrastructure ready?

It is important to also ask: *Is the moral infrastructure ready, and to what extent does it reflect an African morality and reality?* One critical precondition for successful e-government in Africa is a moral agenda that must address, from an African perspective, the ethical challenges associated with the planning and implementation of e-government projects. This is even more important than in other regions of the world, in part because of Africa's history of political instability and inexperienced management. A second

critical precondition is the understanding that both the human and leadership infrastructures cannot be ready without this underlying moral infrastructure.

A project was proposed in a form of a training workshop, that will focus on IE as it relates to the planning and implementation of e-government systems and services in Africa. This workshop will be preceded by a one day seminar entitled: *E-Government in Africa – Planning for the Future*, and the South African Government will be approached to co-sponsored it. The seminar will focus both on the current state and future planning of e-Government in Africa and the ethical challenges associated with planning and implementing E-Government systems and services. Senior representatives from UNESCO and the African Union (in particular the E-Africa Commission) will be invited to address these themes. The invitees, including Directors-General involved in the strategic planning and implementation of E-Government in their respective countries on the continent, will have the opportunity to share their strategies, visions and ethical challenges as it pertains to the planning and implementation of E-Government systems and services. The information from this seminar will provide the context for the workshop.

The project will be a joint effort by the International Centre for Information Ethics, the South African Department of Communications, the E-Africa Commission (NEPAD) the University of Pittsburgh School of Information Sciences Institute for Information Ethics and Policy , the University of Pretoria as well as the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In addition, the U.S. Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) has offered the use of its E-Government Toolkit, a valuable resource providing useful information on e-government practices and practical examples from several countries around. The target group will be senior government officials representing African countries who are directly involved in implement e-government projects. The proposed workshop will take place over the course of 3 days and will be comprised of three parts.

Part I – Day 1 will start with an opening/introductory session where the goals, objectives and activities of the workshop will be explained. The main findings of the preceding seminar will be presented to provide the context for the workshop. This will be followed by an introduction to e-government and its different phases of development

In order to fully understand and deliberate on the ethical issues pertaining to the practical implementation of e-government in Africa, the next session will be devoted to ethical reasoning. This discussion will be very practically oriented, focusing on the guidelines and principles for solving ethical problems. Participants will again be presented the opportunity to share ethical challenges they have encountered in implementation of e-government projects and services.

Part II – Day 2 will start with a more in depth discussion and synthesis of the ethical issues raised during discussions the previous day. The focus will be on how to find solutions to identified ethical challenges as they relate to e-government implementation in Africa, using applicable African based case studies based on real world examples. The participants will break into discussion groups, with an appointed facilitator who will provide feedback. Each case study will be considered from a "citizen-centric" focus, addressing information needs through the lenses of language, content (including Indigenous Knowledge), format (e.g., oral/text/video etc.), available technology and information literacy. At each stage, questions of trust will be addressed, including: trust in the individual providing the information, in the content, and in the organization/agency (e.g., local village or town, local government entity, larger organization, etc. from individual to more remote).

Part III – Day 3 -- will be dedicated to developing recommendations for the creation of a handbook and guidelines for building citizen-centric e-government in Africa. This will include the role of policies and codes of ethics as they pertain to e-government.

Outcomes
The following outcomes are envisioned:
- The enhancement of the knowledge of senior government officials about new developments in e-government systems and services at a broad level and the importance of incorporating information ethics into policy development and the design and development of citizen-centric e-government.
- The training of senior, "front-line" managers who are involved in the implementation of e-government projects in Africa about ethical issues. This training will allow them to train the trainers.
- The publication of an e-government IE handbook/textbook for Africa. This may be a revision of sections of the existing Center for Democracy and Technology/InfoDev E-Gov Tool Kit. The book will contain case studies and will provide practical guidelines on how to address important IE (IE) issues in managing and implementing citizen-centric e-government systems and services.
- The organization of follow – up workshops in other part of Africa that are involved in e-government initiatives

Evaluation and success of workshop
An evaluation form will be distributed at the workshop and there will be a follow-up a few months later to determine what difference the workshop made.