

UbuntuNet CONNECT 2018

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Boosting universities and research centers: NRENs and RRENs are “SMART”

Executive summary

Today's World is looking at Africa, the continent of the 21st century.

Africa has a great challenge ahead in terms of education as its population is very young. Providing secure access to e-infrastructures and services is key to ensure education, research, with societal and economic impacts.

Universities, Research centers, and other institutions with similar activities, can access to their national infrastructure dedicated to their needs: this is their NREN (National Research and Education Network). It's a fantastic asset on which users can rely on, but which also needs national efforts to ensure long term initiatives and sustainability.

As networking means interconnections, RRENs (Regional Research and Education Networks) are strong pieces of the world's puzzle: they “glue” regions of the world together to offer global connectivity. They are built by and for their member NRENs and they bring regional and international connectivity on a basic principle of sharing costs. They can also complete national portfolio of services.

So let's be SMART!

SMART is the key word of the 2018 UbuntuNet conference.

“SMART”(by analogy with SMART indicators) perfectly echoes when defining strategies for NRENs and RRENs.

S for Specific: well, NRENs and RRENs are really specific: they are dedicated to R&E users! A unique target.

M for Measurable: impact of connecting R&E users to NRENs are measurable. It can be with figures (money savings for instance) or in terms of policy and equal access to infrastructure and services. Savings and efficiency are the drivers. Same applies to RRENs.

A for Agreed and Achievable: NRENs and RRENs represent stakeholders. They need to have clear objectives, shared, agreed and then implemented with pragmatism with available resources at their disposal.

R for Realistic: NRENs and RRENs develop in complex environments in terms of policies, telecom market maturity and regulations...funding opportunities from national and international bodies. Good collaboration between NRENs and RRENs is required to be as “realistic” as possible, even using the advice of other regions of the world NRENs or RRENs which are older and more used to dealing with these issues.

T for Time bound: it is highly recommended to NRENs and RRENs to prepare a 3 to 5 years strategic plan (and business plan), to be prepared to ensure smooth development, taking new users on board, develop services etc..

This paper will come back on these objectives, and will also explain why RENATER, the French NREN for 25 years, has decided to share its experiences and expertise with its colleagues on the African continent. Today RENATER is member of WACREN, and due to a common language, devotes efforts into achieving the objectives of the Francophonie in terms of education and research. As UbuntuNet Alliance also has some French speaking member NREN, it might be worth expanding collaboration in this region too.

Summary

Sub-Theme

SMART Governance: Services and tools

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