



South African-initiated research collective aims to establish vocal, credible ICT research capability in and for emerging economies

Power of BRICS countries to be pooled to raise awareness and funding for projects, technologies to help bridge digital divide in these economies

JOHANNESBURG — November 02, 2009 — The voice of emerging countries has been amplified on the global ICT research stage following the formation of the first collective representing researchers in this field from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS).

Initiated by business software provider SAP's South African research unit and the SAP Meraka Unit for technology Development, the workgroup comprising nine research and academic institutions aims to heighten recognition of this collective of emerging economies. The elevated profile will be used to spur debate and gain access to research funding for projects that aim to develop ICT solutions in and for emerging economies.

“We aim to represent the voice of BRICS countries on the research debate, thereby establishing a research platform in a specific domain from emerging economies and a single voice in a particular forum where discussion can take place on funding,” says SAP Research CEC Director, Danie Kok. “As far as we know, this has never been done before and we believe we can effect global impact as there is no collective consisting of researchers, academics and the private sector. We intend becoming a big player in the research field.”

The aim is to build capacity such as research, technology, skills, and competencies in emerging economies through this network of institutions that promotes co-operation and collaboration.

Research areas to be pursued include easy-to-use interface technologies, user-centred design and innovation methodologies, e-government, enabling access to healthcare and education, and creating business applications for very small enterprises in emerging economies.

The Universities of Pretoria and Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the Meraka Institute, CSIR, and NRF are all aligned with the BRICS workgroup, and will benefit and participate in research projects.

International universities aligned with the project include: Universidade do Minho (Portugal), University of Sao Paulo (Brazil), Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, CCG – Centro de Computacao Grafica (Portugal), UNISINOS (Brazil), Saint Petersburg State Polytechnical University (Russia), VICOMTech (Spain), Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile, and the Sino-European Usability Centre of Dalian Maritime University (China).

“Emerging economies share many common needs,” says Kok. “Specifically, they have a need to narrow the gap between rich and poor, as well as rural and urban communities, and under-developed and well-developed areas within their own countries.

“That can, largely, be accomplished by improving the delivery of social services and creating work opportunities without increasing urbanisation. And one of the enabler that makes all this possible on a mass scale and in a relatively short space of time is ICT.”

Three projects have already be identified as a starting point for the group's work, with the first being a project to create a digital content IP platform that would be adopted as a standard for digital TV broadcasts.

The second project aims to create business application services on a mobile platform for very small enterprises in emerging economies.

The third is the development of a common BRICS research agenda addressing ICT for Emerging Economies and the utilization of ICT for socio- economic development.

Research projects will focus on mobile telephony, developing middleware interconnecting the services, convergence of communications systems, and the affordability and simplicity of software and operating systems.

“The provision of a low cost, common, multi-service platform in the cloud cannot be achieved without partnerships among governments, academia, and technology vendors,” says Kok. “The BRICS workgroup provides a centralised organisation that will give the various parties the confidence that their contribution to the research, whether in funds, skills, or information, will be co-ordinated, monitored, and reported on in a transparent and effective manner.”

The group will meet again in March 2010, with members expected to return with a draft research agenda and plans for funding the research agenda and identifying additional research projects.

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