

Global research community bridges digital divide between Africa and Europe through high speed network link

Press Release

UbuntuNet Alliance link to GÉANT2 enables faster collaboration for researchers and students in Sub-Saharan Africa

31 January 2008, Brussels, Belgium: African research capacity is to be boosted through a high speed network link connecting the UbuntuNet Alliance to the international research community via the GÉANT2 network. The connection between the UbuntuNet Alliance's network hub in London and the GÉANT2 network enables researchers and scholars in Sub-Saharan African universities and research institutions to share information and data and to collaborate through a 1 Gbp/s link with their peers in Europe and the rest of the world.

The UbuntuNet Alliance was founded in 2005 by the National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) of Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa with the aim of establishing a research and education network backbone for Sub-Saharan Africa. Membership of the Alliance now includes also the NRENs of Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, and is open to all recognised African NRENs. As well as creating links between national research networks it aims to join Africa to the global research community, with this connection to GÉANT2 the first step towards this vision.

The high capacity connection aims to bridge the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world, and enable faster collaboration on projects across the globe, irrespective of location. It builds on an existing link between South Africa and Europe, extending the benefits of collaboration to researchers and scholars across sub-Saharan Africa.

“Research today is truly global. Scientists, academics and students rely on networks such as Europe's GEANT to pool resources and to work together effectively, no matter where they are based.,” said Viviane Reding European Commissioner for Information Society and Media. “Bringing together the best minds from Africa and from Europe is not only beneficial for science, but beneficial for all citizens of a world that today, depends increasingly on technology, innovation and collaborative research.”

“The UbuntuNet Alliance's vision is to ensure that Africa can participate effectively in the global research community with all involved reaping the benefits of closer international collaboration,” commented Dr F F Tusubira, Acting CEO, UbuntuNet Alliance. “This new high speed link with the global research and education network via GÉANT2 provides the bandwidth to realise our ambitions, making this announcement a major step forward for African research and our overall development. We are most grateful to DANTE, GÉANT2 and Cisco Systems for making this hub and connection possible.”

The link to GÉANT2, the world's most advanced international research and education network, enables collaboration with an estimated 30 million research and education users in 34 countries across the continent connected via the NRENs. Additionally GÉANT2 allows global research collaboration through EU-funded direct connections to China, Latin America,

North Africa, Middle East and South East Asia as well as links to other international networks in the USA and Canada. GÉANT2 is managed by DANTE, an international research and education network provider that plans, builds and manages networks that enable researchers to collaborate globally and share information from worldwide locations.

Dai Davies, General Manager, DANTE added, “This significant connection between GÉANT2 and UbuntuNet underpins even greater global collaboration by providing the world's first regional level connection with research and education networks in Sub-Saharan Africa. The fast link will ensure that African researchers have the facilities to work with their peers and will also help develop Africa’s wider research base and consequently overall economy.”

About UbuntuNet

Because so many African universities and research institutions still depend on satellite links to Europe, the UbuntuNet Alliance established its first network hub in London. Initially, most member NRENs will connect to this hub from the teleports in Europe from which their VSAT connections emanate. In time, as terrestrial fibre networks in Africa evolve and as greater submarine cable connectivity between Africa and Europe is deployed, UbuntuNet will develop its envisaged “GÉANT2 of Africa” network, and will establish high-bandwidth connections to the London Hub and hence to GÉANT2 and the global research and education network.

About GÉANT2:

GÉANT2 is an advanced pan-European backbone network that interconnects National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) across Europe. With an estimated 30 million research and education users in more than 34 countries across the continent connected via the NRENs, GÉANT2 offers unrivalled geographical coverage, high bandwidth, innovative hybrid networking technology and a range of user-focused services, making it the most advanced international network in the world. Together with the NRENs it connects, GÉANT2 has links totalling more than 50,000km in length and its extensive geographical reach interconnects networks in other world regions to enable global research collaboration. Europe’s academics and researchers can exploit dedicated GÉANT2 point-to-point links, creating optical private networks that connect specific research centres.

GÉANT2 is co-funded by the European Commission under the EU’s Sixth Research and Development Framework Programme. The project partners are 30 European National Research and Education Networks (NRENs), TERENA and DANTE. GÉANT2 is operated by DANTE on behalf of Europe’s NRENs. For more information, visit www.geant2.net

About DANTE:

DANTE is a non-profit organisation, co-funded by the European Commission and working in partnership with European National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) to plan, build and operate advanced networks for research and education. Established in 1993, DANTE has been fundamental to the success of pan-European research and education networking. DANTE has built and operates GÉANT2, which provides the data communications infrastructure essential to the success of many research projects in Europe. DANTE is involved in worldwide initiatives to interconnect countries in the other regions to one another and to GÉANT2. DANTE currently manages projects focussed on the

Mediterranean, Latin American and Asia-Pacific regions through the EUMEDCONNECT, ALICE and TEIN2 projects, respectively. For more information, visit www.dante.net

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