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## NEW TECHNOLOGIES: ICTS

### NEWS

# Madagascar launches online research network

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[ANTANANARIVO] Madagascar has launched an online research network, the Research and Education Network for Academic Learning Activities (iRENALA), which aims to boost science, technology and education in the country, as well as internationalise its science.

The network, launched earlier this month (8 June), will promote discussions between worldwide **researchers**, students and policymakers, and facilitate access to digitised documents available in virtual libraries, according to Horace Gatien, president of Toamasina University. It will also encourage remote learning in the higher education sector, he said.

According to a statement issued at a government cabinet meeting last month (30 May), the project aims to forge new links between Madagascar's six state **universities**, three higher institutes of technology, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and all national research centres.

iRENALA will also connect Madagascar to a cluster of worldwide networks through GÉANT, an existing pan-European research and education network, which connects 40 million users in over 8,000 institutions worldwide.

"Madagascar is one of five African countries ... [privileged] with such an opportunity", said Ny Hasina Andriamanjato, the Malagasy minister of post, telecommunications and **new technologies**.

Andriamanjato added that the network is part of wider movement of digitising African universities, an idea launched by African researchers during a France-Africa summit held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in December 1996.

The project stems from an agreement signed in December 2011 between the government and Telma, an Internet and **mobile phone** service provider, which functions via the high speed fibre optic cable running through the Eastern African Submarine Cable System.

"Learning and research activities are destined to improve, despite the fact that Malagasy universities are poorly equipped with infrastructure and resources," the Malagasy prime minister, Jean Omer Beriziky, said at the launch. "We will produce many more experts capable of taking the country forward and ending poverty within 20 years."



The Malagasy prime minister hopes the 20-year project will produce experts capable of ending poverty  
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Patrick Pisal-Hamida, chief executive of Telma, said at the launch: "From today, a new era has begun for the higher **education** system in Madagascar. A fundamental stage has been reached, thanks to the digitalising of the universities and other institutions involved in research."

Etienne Hilaire Razafindehibe, minister of higher education and scientific research, said the iRENALA association was created to ensure effective use of the network, but he added that users will have to pay to access the network.

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