PROJECT INFORMATION DOCUMENT (PID)
IDENTIFICATION/CONCEPT STAGE

Report No.: PIDC27837

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I. Introduction and Context

Country Context

The Union of Comoros (UoC) is a low income small nation made up of three islands - Grande Comore, Anjouan and Mohéli with a total estimated population of 752,400 inhabitants in 2012. A fourth island, Mayotte, remained part of France after independence in 1975. Grande Comore is the largest island, and is home to about half of the country’s population and the country’s capital, Moroni. Anjouan has the largest population density of 575 inhabitants/km2 and 42 percent of the population, while Moheli is the smallest and least populated island with 6 percent of the population and 171 inhabitants/km2. Like other small island nations, Comoros is characterized by geographical isolation, limited resources, a small domestic market, a narrow export base and a high dependence on food imports and remittances. The lack of good port facilities also makes transport and communication difficult between the islands. In addition, since independence, Comoros has experienced recurrent political crises and conflicts between the islands. This instability has contributed to a long-term decline in real income per capita and taken a severe toll on the government's ability to deliver quality services.

Despite these challenges, economic growth has improved in recent years, consistently exceeding 2 percent since 2009, and reaching an eight-year high of 3.5 percent in 2013. Factors for this trend include stronger agricultural exports, increased construction activities, increased foreign aid and resilient levels of remittances. Likewise, private investment picked up to 10 percent of GDP in 2012 after years of decline, while the services and industry sectors of the economy make up 48 percent...
and 12 percent of GDP respectively. Agriculture is a key component of economic growth in Comoros, generating almost half of GDP between 2000 and 2009, a share significantly higher than in other islands of the Indian Ocean Island region. The sector also accounted for 90 percent of budgetary revenues, and 57 percent of employment. Macroeconomic management has improved, and an Extended Credit Facility program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from 2009 - 2013 supported key structural reforms under a more stable power sharing agreement across the islands.

Nevertheless, Comoros remains vulnerable to macroeconomic volatility caused primarily by weak fiscal policy and a lack of fiscal space for investment in infrastructure and social sectors. In 2014, economic activity decelerated slightly to 3.0 percent as structural reforms in key infrastructure sectors like electricity and telecom continued to be delayed. Market prices and the country’s production of cash crops (particularly ylang-ylang, vanilla and cloves) have also fallen in recent years, and with it, the contribution of agriculture to GDP reduced to 35% in 2014. While monetary policies continue to be prudent and have remained in conformity with the Comorian Franc Zone monetary arrangement, the major source of macroeconomic vulnerability remains fiscal policy. The low level of domestic revenues along with a small tax base, the dependency on volatile foreign grants, increasing expenditures on the wage bill and energy subsidies, and the accumulated arrears have all reduced the fiscal space available to the Government. This has severely constrained much-needed public spending on infrastructure (particularly electricity and water supply), as well as investment in social sectors such as health, education, social protection and labor.

Poverty also remains widespread in Comoros - according to the most recent Complete Household Survey of 2004, 44.8 percent of the population lives in poverty, while the extreme poverty incidence was recorded at 36.9 percent. With a Gini coefficient of 0.557, inequality in Comoros is high. Poverty more widespread in rural areas where over 60 percent of the population resides. Specifically, 4 out of 5 rural households are classified as poor, while in urban areas, only 1 in 4 are poor. Development indicators for rural areas also lag behind those for urban areas, with more prevalent stunting among children, a greater fertility rate among women of childbearing age, more widespread adult illiteracy, and a greater share of the population lacking access to adequate sanitation services. With population growth estimated at 2.9 percent a year, the population of the UoC is projected to reach one million in twelve years and to more than double by the year 2050. Much faster economic growth sustained over a long period will be needed to combat poverty in this scenario.

Because of the country’s weak socioeconomic development and history of political instability, many Comorians have migrated elsewhere. According to United Nations (UN) statistics, in 2012 there were 108,986 Comorians living abroad, mostly concentrated in France and Mayotte. The UoC benefits from large remittances from the Comorian diaspora that are a crucial component of the economy and are among the highest per capita in the world. Over 90 percent of remittances are estimated to go to the island of Grande Comore. This situation reduces the opportunity cost of unemployment, particularly among youth, and can affect motivation to overcome constraints to self-employment and entrepreneurship.

**Sectoral and Institutional Context**

Most of Comoros’ employment is in the informal sector. Data from the first national survey on employment and the informal sector in the Comoros (EESIC), conducted by the National Institute
of Statistics, Economic and Demographic Studies (INSEE) in 2013 indicates that 54.2 percent of the population is working age (aged 15-64) and relatively well-educated (literacy rates have almost doubled from 41.7 percent in 2003 to 73 percent in 2013). Employment in the formal public and private sector of Comoros accounts for 26.3% of jobs. The majority of jobs (73.1 percent) are in the informal sector, which includes a sizable proportion of women, and consists largely of small and medium scale enterprises in agriculture, fisheries, retail trade, and services. Despite the high proportion of precarious and vulnerable employment in the informal sector, it presents opportunities for further growth and investment, and is likely to remain the main creator of jobs in the country in the near future.

Comoros has significant gender differences in labor force participation. Female labor force participation was comparatively low at 32 percent in 2004 as opposed to approximately 43 percent for men, and there were more unemployed women than men in 2004. Labor force participation was higher for people aged 30 to 50 years, although the rate for women (50 – 60 percent) was still lower than that for men of the same age (80 to 89 percent). This gender gap has widened over the years, and in 2013, 61.4 percent of the working population was male, compared to 38.6 percent female participation. This situation is due in part to the fact that Comoros has a large number of female-headed households because of the high rate of migration (among other factors). Female employment is also more likely to be precarious, with more women who are self-employed than men. There are very few women in wage-earning non-agricultural work (13.7 percent) and approximately two-thirds of women work in the informal agricultural sector.

Comoros is also an island with a very young population - over 70% of the population is 24 years and below. Comorian youth, defined as the population aged 15-35 years, take up 39.4% of both and informal sector jobs. Youth, however, often lack work experience demanded from formal sector jobs, and are more likely to acquire advanced degrees in fields that do not align with the current demands of the private sector, hence, few are guaranteed to find a job at the end of their education. Furthermore, there are credit constraints for youth who wish to start their own businesses. Banks, Microfinance Institutions and other financial institutions typically demand collateral in the form of either land or gold, assets which are difficult to obtain, particularly for urban youth with no access to communal or family lands. While the unemployment rate has continued to rise from 13.5 percent in 2004 to 14.3 percent in 2008, the situation is more severe for youth under 25 years - unemployment in this age bracket is 4 times higher than for adults aged 30 to 49 years. This situation puts the fragile political and socioeconomic stability at further risk of derailment.

Skills appear to be a constraint, as Comoros has among the lowest secondary and tertiary education completion rates in the world. According to the 2004 household survey, 70 percent of the population had not finished primary education and around 2.6 percent had completed tertiary education. This leaves a large part of the population with inadequate skills. In addition, tertiary education is predominantly general academic training and falls short of the needs of the labor market. Technical and vocational education and training are predominantly informal. Among those who do receive formal training, few are able to find jobs in their chosen field.

These factors have resulted in a growing number of idle youth who do not have access to capital or financing, low technical skills, and minimal practical experience to participate in the Comorian labor market. Moreover, the country’s long history of out-migration, as well as remittances means that many young people are waiting for a chance to leave the country rather than invest in the meaningful, long term economic activities. There is, however, untapped potential for growth and
investment in the country’s agricultural sector, particularly for youth in rural areas. The average age of a farm manager in Comoros was 53 years in 2004, and given the relative importance of the agricultural sector to GDP, investments by youth in this sector are critical to continued economic growth. In addition, while the emphasis may have been on cash crops, following the depreciation of the price of vanilla, its cultivation is gradually being replaced by potentially more profitable food crops. Furthermore, there is evidence that there is growing demand for local agricultural produce (both raw crops such as bananas and processed foods), as imports are not enough to satiate national demand. Other factors for investment in agriculture include the proximity of promising international markets (Mayotte and Madagascar), and imports which are not only dependent on unpredictable weather patterns of the Indian Ocean, but also put a strain scarce economic resources.

In urban areas, there is a lack of basic skills to complement a burgeoning private sector in construction (such as masonry, carpentry, and plumbing technicians), as well as services in information technology, and tourism. However, given the structural disadvantages that young people have in the labor market, a dedicated intervention to help youth take advantage of the potential private sector opportunities is warranted.

The proposed project will increase the contribution of youth to the country’s private sector development and is complementary to other initiatives. By extending access to skills training, financing, advisory and counseling services for youth, the project seeks to expand young people’s opportunities to develop income generation activities, thus boosting shared prosperity for the bottom 40 percent of the population. The JSDF grant is complementary to the initiatives by other Development Partners (DPs) who are engaged in employment promotion and skills development activities in Comoros. The World Bank has been supporting the private sector development through a study that identified key investment sectors with potential for economic development, and is engaging in strengthening the country’s financial sector including for micro-finance. Other complementary measures are carried out by (i) the International Labor Organization (ILO), which has a significant experience in skills training initiatives for youth in agriculture, artisanal, construction and services sectors, as in addition to its support on labor regulations, (ii) the European Union (EU) whose support includes technical assistance and the development of a comprehensive technical and vocational training accreditation system, and (iii) the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which has supported the equipping and operationalization of agricultural training centers across all three islands to provide training on improved farming techniques in rural areas. Through the innovative approach of providing both skills development and start up inputs, this JSDF complements these ongoing initiatives and fills a gap of direct service delivery to disadvantaged urban and rural youth with a comprehensive package of services. The project would provide further lessons for government and development partners on tailoring effective employment promotion strategies to Comorian youth.

Relationship to CAS/CPS/CPF
The proposed project is in line with the Strategic Priority 1 of the UoC’s Accelerated Growth Strategy for Sustainable Development (Stratégie do Croissance Accélérée pour le Développement Durable - SCA2D 2015-2019), specifically the goals on the promotion for accelerated, diversified and sustainable growth as it seeks to improve access to income generation opportunities for Comorian youth. In addition, this project is consistent with the macroeconomic framework and sectoral strategies identified in the country’s National Employment Policy (NEP), which identifies 3 main areas of focus; (i) skills development and employability; (ii) promotion of the productivity of
private companies and the effectiveness of public administration; and (iii) the legal, social and institutional promotion of employment, which includes multisectoral policies and strategies to influence demand and improving mechanisms and institutions of the labor market in the Comoros.

This proposed JSDF-financed project has been prepared in close consultation with the Embassy of Japan in Comoros (located in Madagascar) - this mission has consistently encouraged and supported this project since 2014. The project also contributes to Pillar II of the World Bank’s 2014 Country Partnership Strategy, which focuses on increasing private sector income and employment. Other related projects in the Bank’s portfolio include the First South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Governance and Shared Growth Project which aims to improve the management of fisheries and increase the economic benefits from fishing-related activities for families living in the coastal communities of the South West Indian Ocean region, including Comoros, as well as a private sector development study.

The project is also directly related to the new Comoros Social Safety Net (SSN) Project (P150754), which was approved by the Bank’s Board of Directors on March 17, 2015 and became effective on July 2, 2015. The objective of the Comoros SSN project is to increase poor communities’ access to safety net and nutrition services in Comoros, through cash-for-work sub-projects that increase productive capacity and resilience to climatic events. The JSDF will complement the SSN project by combining youth employment activities with the provision of safety nets in the same poor rural communities targeted under the SSN. The JSDF will therefore contribute to a comprehensive package of training and inputs to disadvantaged youth as a graduation strategy for safety net beneficiary communities. The two projects will also provide capacity building of local and regional institutions for effective skills development service delivery.

The proposed JSDF builds on the experience with previous World Bank social protection and emergency support in Comoros, specifically; (i) the Emergency Food-Security and Unemployment Support through Cash-for-Work project, a JSDF-funded grant implemented from 2011 - 2014 that succeeded in achieving its objective of improving access to short term employment in food insecure areas in response to the global food and economic crises, and (ii) the Comoros Emergency Crisis Response Project (P120631) which provided short term employment to poor households as well as community development infrastructure.

II. Project Development Objective(s)

Proposed Development Objective(s)
The development objective of the proposed project is to improve access to income generation opportunities for targeted youth in Comoros.

Specifically, the project will promote entrepreneurship among Comorian youth through access to a comprehensive menu of technical, business and life skills and start-up capital. This approach builds on successful and innovative youth employment initiatives in Africa and Latin America which combine the development of soft and technical skills with the provision of financing and inputs to promote entrepreneurship and self-employment among less educated youth.

Key Results
Achievement of the objectives would be measured by the following key performance indicators:

1. Number of targeted youth initiating or expanding household enterprises with support from the project (disaggregated by (a) initiating household enterprises and (b) expanding household enterprises, and (c) rural/urban areas).
2. Direct project beneficiaries (Core) (disaggregated by male/female, urban/rural).
3. Beneficiaries of labor market programs (Core).
4. Percentage of youth beneficiaries that are satisfied with the services received.

Intermediary indicators include:
1. Percentage of beneficiaries that finish the 6 month training and internship program.
2. Number of NGOs/CBOs that participate in the training activities as Service Providers.

III. Preliminary Description

Concept Description
The proposed project will directly benefit about 4,000 targeted youth aged 18–30 years, of which at least 50 percent will be female. Given the strong draw of remittances, this project will prioritize youth who are motivated and can demonstrate at least 6 months work experience in any field (such as household enterprises in the informal sector or formal sector employment). The poverty focus of the project is, inter alia, reflected in that 70 percent of beneficiaries will be selected from poor rural communities under Component 1, while 30 percent of beneficiaries will be chosen from urban areas in all 3 islands of Comoros under Component 2.

The income generation capacity of Comorian youth in both rural and urban areas is constrained by; (i) lack of skills that are relevant to growing sectors of the economy, particularly construction, tourism, and agriculture, (ii) high inflow of remittances (which reduces the opportunity cost of under- and unemployment), (iii) lack of formal sector jobs (the preferred employment option of many Comorian youth), (iv) high risks related to the returns to entrepreneurship, and (v) stringent credit terms that constrain access to financing. This project will support self-employment among youth by providing access to skills training and start-up capital (specifically financing and inputs) in viable sectors of the Comorian economy. This approach builds on successful youth employment initiatives in Africa and Latin America which combine the development of soft and technical skills with the provision of start-up capital to promote self-employment among youth.

The project is innovative because it enables synergies between active labor market programs and safety nets in Comoros. Evidence from other safety net projects (such as the graduation model developed initially by BRAC in Bangladesh and promoted by the Ford Foundation), demonstrates that beneficiaries who receive both safety nets and activation services enjoy sustained increases in welfare after project interventions. Thus, while the Cash for Work initiatives under the Comoros SSN project provide short term income and consumption support through cash transfers for households, this JSDF provides a package of services to youth in the same rural communities to boost livelihoods in the longer term.

The proposed Project will include 3 components as follows:

a. Component 1: Income Generation Support for Rural Youth
b. Component 2: Income Generation Support for Urban Youth
c. Component 3: Program Management and Capacity Building of Service Providers
Component 1: Income Generation Support for Rural Youth (US$ 1.75 million)

The objective of this component is to support the initiation or expansion of small scale agribusinesses by targeted rural youth. This will be achieved through the provision of technical, business and life skills training, as well as tools and equipment to support youth enterprises in food crops and livestock production. The component will benefit poor rural youth who will be selected from the extremely poor and rural communities chosen to benefit from the Comoros SSN project. These JSDF beneficiary communities (a subset of the SSN communities), as well as the youth quotas for each community, will be determined using criteria that include poverty rates, existence of qualified service providers to undertake training, availability of technical support by the Ministry of Agriculture, and population density of youth (to take advantage of economies of scale in the delivery of training and inputs). Youth with at least 6 months prior work experience (either self-owned or on a family farm) will be prioritized for selection. If the community quota remains unmet with this cohort, motivated youth with no prior experience who successfully complete the application process would be considered for selection. The communities will be rolled onto the program in phases, with 40% of youth reached during the first year and 60% during the second year of implementation.

Youth will be selected through an on-demand selection process to identify beneficiaries who would be supported to expand an existing agribusiness or initiate a new enterprise. The selection process for the youth beneficiaries will proceed as follows:

- Community sensitization on the objectives of the project;
- Call for proposals for investments in agriculture through a community meeting and local stakeholders/community groups to identify potential beneficiaries;
- Interested youth submit an agribusiness proposal;
- Scoring and shortlisting of proposals according to pre-determined criteria, including access to land, profitability, and availability of viable markets for the produce;
- Shortlisted youth will be interviewed by a professional assessment panel to further evaluate the youth’s past experiences, potential to execute the proposal, and their understanding of the opportunities and constraints of their proposal;
- Youth who meet the minimum scores for the interviews will be validated with a Community Committee to verify peer and community endorsements of shortlisted youth;
- Final selection and announcement of beneficiaries.

Access to land is a pre-condition for participating in this component. The project will formalize youth’s access to land through Memoranda of Understanding between each youth group and community or family land owners. The MOU will detail the terms of the use of the land, including duration and ownership of proceeds. After the selection process, the selected youth would be allowed to form groups of up to 5 members, according to their common areas of interest. Each group would then be facilitated to develop a detailed implementation plan for their joint business venture, including training milestones and inputs required over a two-year period. A detailed menu of preferred activities (sub-projects) to be supported will be developed for each island, tailored to the unique climatic, socio-economic and environmental conditions, soil quality, accessibility of markets, and availability of expertise to provide technical training in each location. A preliminary list of eligible and ineligible sub-projects to be supported is included in annex 1. Proposals that are not part of the menu of opportunities will be considered and approved by the project implementing
agency on a case by case basis, depending on the strength of the proposal, qualifications for the youth, and availability of technical expertise to support implementation.

A customized package of business, technical and life skills training, an apprenticeship (inclusive of transportation allowances), and start-up capital (e.g. small agricultural tools/equipment, improved seedlings, and small ruminants/chicks for livestock or poultry farmers) that are relevant to the youth group’s chosen area of investment will be delivered in 2 phases over the 3 year implementation period of the intervention in each area. The first phase of 6 months will be composed of the following; (i) business skills in the management of a small farm (basic management and accounting, record keeping, profit-making, and marketing); (ii) technical skills training on improved techniques in undertaking selected agricultural activities (e.g. land preparation and cultivation, nursery development, rearing of poultry/small ruminants); (iii) life skills, focusing on conflict resolution, communication, decision making and problem solving; and (iv) an apprenticeship with skilled farmers to gain practical training and insights from experienced masters.

The performance of youth at the end of Phase 1 will be assessed by the apprenticeship provider and an independent expert from the Agricultural Chamber of Commerce to determine competence and readiness for the youth to proceed to the next stage. Phase 2 of the project will be implemented over 18 months, during which each youth group will continue to be supported by coaches/counselors who would provide business and technical guidance, and evaluate the achievement of the agreed milestones of the implementation plan. In addition, the inputs approved in the sub-project implementation plan will be released in tranches to the youth according to the achievement of each milestone to facilitate the initiation/expansion of the agribusinesses. Further details of the implementation processes of this component will be provided in the Project Implementation Manual (PIM).

Component 2: Income Generation Support for Urban Youth (US$ 750,000)

The objective of this component is to support the initiation or expansion of small scale enterprises among urban youth by improving access to skills training and start-up capital. This component will be implemented as a pilot, since the approach of combining skills training with access to financing has been largely untested in Comoros. This component will be targeted towards educated urban youth who are either new entrants and youth in existing businesses. This target group has been selected to develop and test this model for Comoros, before being scaled up to reach more vulnerable populations. Beneficiary youth will be provided with skills training, specifically; (i) business skills (including development of the business implementation plan and target milestones, entrepreneurial skills, basic accounting, management, growth and profit strategies, and marketing), (ii) technical skills in their selected vocational area of interest; and (iii) life skills support (focusing on conflict resolution, communication, decision making and problem solving). In addition, the participants will carry out an internship with a well-established enterprise within their proposed sub-project sector. The component will also provide tools, equipment and financing for the initiation or expansion of youth enterprises. 3 urban localities (one on each island) will be selected in the first year of implementation, to enable learning to inform the design of subsequent 2 years of implementation.

An on-demand selection process will be used to target youth under this component, and would include the following steps:
• A call for youth to present business proposals, which would include a Public Information Campaign with advertisements in the local press, youth organizations, local leaders, CSOs, and financial institutions in the target localities;
• Interested youth submit a business proposal using the approved template;
• Shortlisting of proposals according to pre-determined criteria, including feasibility, literacy and numeracy competencies, competitiveness, profitability, utilization of appropriate market data, and identification of potential markets;
• Shortlisted youth will be interviewed by an assessment panel to further evaluate the youth’s understanding of the opportunities and constraints of their proposal, past experiences, and their potential to execute the proposal presented;
• Final selection and announcement of beneficiary youth.

A preliminary list of eligible and ineligible sub-projects to be supported under is included in annex 1. These sectors are in line with the National Employment Policy, whose strategic goals include the promotion of productivity of private companies in the major essential and productive sectors of the economy (particularly agriculture, livestock, tourism, and construction). Support for enterprises in other sectors such as information technology has been included based on successes of existing programs and businesses in these sectors for youth. As with component 1, proposals that are not part of the menu of opportunities will be considered and approved by the implementing agency on a case by case basis, depending on the strength of the proposal, qualifications for the youth, and availability of technical expertise to support implementation.

In developing the training program, the project will undertake stakeholder consultations with both formal and informal sector employers to identify their skills demands, as well as youth to express their training needs in their areas of livelihood interest. The training sessions will be undertaken in groups of 10-15 youth, aggregated based on their common areas of interest. Upon successful completion of approximately 6 months of training and internship experience, youth will then be provided with intensive one-on-one mentorships, refresher courses, coaching sessions, start-up tools/equipment, and financing to support the establishment and growth their business enterprises. The amount of financing per youth will be determined based on the existing lessons on the minimum amount capital required to receive on-the-job training and start a household enterprise. The capital will be released in tranches to the participants according to the achievement of each milestone of the business implementation plan over the remaining 18 months implementation period. Further details of the implementation processes will be provided in the PIM.

Component 3: Project Implementation and Capacity Building of Service Providers (US$ 500,000)

The objective of this component is to support activities related to project management, evaluation and coordination of the Project which will be implemented by the Fonds d'Appui au Developpement Communautaire (FADC). This includes procurement of technical assistance, project-related equipment, goods and services, and operating costs for the implementation of the project. The component will also finance the training of experienced local/regional organizations, which will be competitively selected to manage the selection and training of beneficiaries, and the delivery of start-up capital to youth in the targeted communities. As such, this component will include capacity building to selected trainers and service providers on methods of coaching disadvantaged youth through a training of trainers (ToT) model utilizing the Train-Teach-Train (TTT) approach to encourage the full absorption of training materials. These trainings will include capacity building on
methods, best practices and content based on needs identified by the NGOs and CSOs. A curriculum for training of trainers will be developed and piloted through this project, which could be utilized in the future programming as applicable with the NGOs and CSOs taking the lead on curriculum design.

Finally, the component will include support for a monitoring and evaluation system for the project. The objective of the project M&E system is to: (a) monitor progress and results of project interventions at the community, island and national levels, (b) strengthen the national capacity to conduct and manage relevant M&E activities, and (c) use the information generated in evidence-based policy-making. A strong, gender-sensitive M&E system is an integral part of the project activities and provides management with a timely decision-making tool. The M&E system is crucial for the learning and thus success of the project as it will ensure that problems are identified and solved as they emerge, lessons learned are incorporated into the project design, and project outcomes are ultimately assessed. A tracking evaluation and beneficiary assessment of both components will also be undertaken to assess the project’s effect on employment and earnings of youth, as well as their level of satisfaction with the design and implementation of the program.

IV. Safeguard Policies that Might Apply

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VI. Contact point

World Bank
Contact: Andrea Vermehren
Title: Lead Social Protection Special
Tel: 458-0657
Email: avermehren@worldbank.org

Borrower/Client/Recipient
Name: Ministry of Finance, Economy, Investment, and Commerce
Contact: Mohamed Ali Soilihi
Title: Minister
Tel: 269 773 99 00
Email: moincharani@yahoo.fr;

Implementing Agencies
Name: Fonds d'Appui au Delopement Communautaire (FADC)
Contact: Doulfat Kamal
Title: DG
Tel: 002697732882
Email: fadc@comoretelecom.km

VII. For more information contact:
The InfoShop
The World Bank
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20433
Telephone: (202) 458-4500
Fax: (202) 522-1500
Web: http://www.worldbank.org/infoshop