

## **Achieving the MDGs through the Use of Information and Communication Technologies**

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At the present time, there is broad consensus on the impact Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have at different levels of society and they are recognised as important tool in meeting development challenges.

Or in order for ICT to positively foster development goals, it must be employed where relevant, appropriate and effective. The paper will make an overall presentation of the role that ICTs currently play in promoting development and discuss its strengths and weakness.

Over the years the role of ICTs both established (radio, television, video, compact disc) and emerging (wireless, Internet, broadband), as a powerful if not indispensable tool in the massive scaling up and inter-linkage of development interventions and outcomes inherent in this objective has become recognized.

ICTs offer enormous opportunities to narrow social and economic inequalities and support sustainable local wealth creation by overcoming obstacles of geographic isolation, lack of access to information and challenges in communication.

Recent developments in technologies, reduction in prices, greater availability of networks and a more user friendly approach to technologies have strengthened this role and the interaction ICTs-development takes a new approach as of the adoption by the UN of the so called "Millennium Development Goals" (MDGs) in the year 2000, within the framework of the Millennium Summit.

Through their Millennium Declaration, 147 Heads of State and Government affirmed their commitment to working together to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level and to reduce poverty and made a commitment that the number of people who live on less than one dollar a day should be halved by the year 2015.

They agreed on the set of goals to guide global development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These Goals that have become a frame of reference for just about all organizations working in development set clear targets for reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women.

The Declaration acknowledges that ICTs are an important tool in meeting this challenges as harnessing the power of ICTs can contribute substantially to realizing each and every millennium goal, either directly or indirectly and not only in MDG 8 for witch the infrastructure aspect of ICTs has been clearly identified.

ICT can effectively contribute to achievement of the MDGs particularly those related to income poverty reduction, education, health, environment and gender equity through by creating economic opportunities and contributing to poverty reduction, managing the processes of providing basic services ( eg health care, education) at lower cost and with greater coverage facilitating access to information and the involvement of stakeholders, through greater transparency and support to networking at every stage and

enhancing the capacity to measure, monitor and report progress on the goals.

The recent report of the United Nations Millennium Project and the United Nations Secretary-General's report "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005) have both highlighted the importance of science, innovation and technology in realizing the MDGs and related national development priorities

ICTs are a powerful enabler of development goals because it dramatically improves communication and the exchange of knowledge and information to strengthen and create new social and economic networks.

Its uses and applications are pervasive and cross-cutting and can be applied to the full range of human activity from personal use to business and government. It propitiates an acceleration factor through the power of the network that becomes ever more powerful and useful the more people are connected to it, thus creating network externalities or exponentially increasing returns as network usage increases. And it fosters the dissemination of information and exchange of knowledge by separating content from physical location and overcoming distance.

Crucial in the poverty context, ICT can also radically reduce transaction costs in an extremely cost-effective way

Although there is a little doubt that ICTs are generating social, economic, cultural and political changes it is difficult to quantify the impact of ICTs to what extent ICTs have helped to directly reduce major development concerns reflected in the MDGs such as poverty, hunger or sickness and to separate their influence from those of other factors, such as governance or economic growth.

One reason for the lack of evidence is that MDG monitoring only started recently. The effect of ICT is constantly under review and there is a clear need for more data and analysis to try to understand the impact of ICTs on the social and economic context to set a universal system of indicators that may allow to measure the impact of the above-mentioned technologies on the fulfilment of MDGs as well as to enable the comparability of such incidence in different regions. In effect, this will be one the essential issues to be dealt with at the Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can play a critical role in sustainable human development and poverty eradication. Yet the field of ICT for Development is at a turning point.

While the net effect is generally perceived as positive they can also have negative impacts on health and environment and can aggravate existing disparities in the social level. There have been numerous allegations over the years about the dangers of excessive of ICTs. While the internet afford greater public information and autonomy in understanding health matters not all information is reliable not to mention the growing amount of spam, viruses and hacking incidents.

Existing data suggests that large strides have been made towards enhancing access to ICTS Access remains largely a function of affordability in many countries with the risk that existing inequalities are reinforces or exacerbated.

Progress in narrowing the gap between those developing countries now empowered by the fundamental right of access to local and global networks of knowledge and information, and those developing countries still impoverished by the practical denial of that right, is widening and as stark as ever.

In spite of immense progress in expanding the reach of basic and new ICT services and applications in developing countries, the majority of the world's population still does not have access to telephone service. Computers or the Internet, even broadcast signals are virtually unknown to millions and the so-called "digital divide" has shifted perilously in recent years to the detriment of the poorest and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), with major missed opportunities for the achievement of the MDGs.

According to the ICT Development Indices Report for 2004 South Asian and African Countries have a considerable way to go in connectivity and ICT diffusion

This very low level of penetration in developing countries includes a lack of awareness of what these technologies can offer, absence of adequate legal and regulatory frameworks, shortage of requisite human capacity, failure to develop local language content and a lack of entrepreneurship and business culture open to change, transparency and social equality.

However ICTs should not be seen as a panacea for all development problems. Although multidimensional as ICTs offer the potential to share information across traditional barriers, to give a voice to traditionally unheard peoples, to provide valuable information that enhances economic, health and educational activities they are particularly effective only when used appropriately as part of an overall development strategy.

In order for ICT to positively foster development goals, it must be employed where relevant, appropriate and effective. In addition, perennial cross-sector complexities and issues must be overcome within existing approaches to ICT for Development to create an enabling environment for innovation and to prioritize a focus on investment and development uses of ICT. there is still a long road ahead before such technologies are included in the development agendas, given the fact that Southern countries do not usually give priority to investment in these areas.

The success of ICTS mechanisms implemented in developing countries depends heavily on the economic, social and institutional structures in which they are embedded. one of the recurrent problems that reverberates on the possibilities of investing in ICTs as instruments for the fulfilment of MDGs is that which refers to the lack of financing mechanisms for such investments, either at private, public or private-public level; and also to the secondary role ICTs are allocated by governments within public programmes or services

The private sector has a massive role in terms of investment, innovation and partnership and Governments are instrumental in shaping the enabling environment, attracting investment as well as balancing the ICT policies with national policies and strategies. achieving the MDG requires a clear political commitment to make science and technologies top priorities in the national development agendas. It is focused on three sub themes: infrastructure building as a foundation for science and technological development, the mutual interaction and dependency of Science and Technology Education with Research and Development; and the promotion of gainful employment and enterprise development through the use of new technologies, with a special focus on ICT and biotech

Last but not least Civil Society has a special competence and capacity in linking communities to the benefits of ICTs.

The growth of the Internet in China and Egypt as well as in the Republic of Korea and the Czech Republic, Estonia and Costa Rica show that in each case despite difference of the market development was a success as the key players worked together in the common interest.

Moving decisively towards an inclusive information society requires, as an indispensable initial building block, a shared understanding of the nature and scope of challenges and opportunities, and developing broad common approaches to dealing with them. Today, however, the stark reality is that building such consensus is an evolving process at a very early stage of development. The developed and developing countries, governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, the development, ICT, trade and foreign policy communities - all have yet to come to a common understanding and prioritization of issues, as well as agreement on the approaches, governance structures and implementation mechanisms for moving forward.

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