



**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Statement by Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the United Nations  
Development Programme  
to  
the World Summit on the Information Society**

**Geneva, 11 December 2003**

Information and communication technologies are transforming societies and bringing positive change faster than any other current phenomenon – in developed and developing countries alike. While it took television and personal computers decades to gain mass usage, in only four years the Internet gained 50 million users and in just ten years, the proportion of Internet users in developing countries has risen from 2 per cent to 32 per cent.

ICT has a vital role to play in development, not just in accelerating economic growth in local economies, but also in achieving the universally agreed Millennium Development Goals, from halving extreme poverty, to halting the spread of HIV/Aids, to health and education. Already we are seeing how ICT can be harnessed to improve access and expand basic services, cut transaction costs, improve government efficiency and make development possible. But the potential of this revolution in development has still not been



fully realized. With the right set of policies and practice, ICT could do far more to address the development challenges we face.

The task for all of us - at this Summit and beyond - is how can we use the unprecedented opportunities the information and communications revolution has brought for a revolution in development, one that brings real and lasting change to the world's poor?

Incorporating ICT into development should, I believe, be founded on three key pillars: practice, policy and partnerships.

First practice. As scorekeeper and campaign manager of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) within the UN system, UNDP is active in 100 countries from Azerbaijan to Zambia, encouraging the application of ICTs to realize major development objectives wherever possible. We are co-sponsoring a \$12 million distance-learning programme in China, a \$10 million Trust Fund in Egypt for a range of ICT applications, a \$ 7 million programme of civil service reform in Lebanon, and multi-million dollar programmes on e-governance in Albania and Mozambique.



Just as important if we are to successfully integrate ICT into development is good policy. Nothing is automatic in the diffusion of information and communications technologies: policies – and an enabling environment – are critical. The ICT revolution has thrown up numerous examples of local initiatives and entrepreneurship that have flourished, not because of, but in spite of, the prevailing regulatory framework. It is essential that frameworks adapt to ensure that good initiatives can proliferate to the benefit of all. More than 70 countries have formulated their own policy frameworks and road maps to the information society and UNDP has been able to play an important part in helping a growing number of countries to formulate these “e-strategies.”

By definition, central to building new knowledge societies is the need for the free flow of information. We have seen how ICT has helped new and alternative media emerge to enrich societies across the world. Freedom of the media is not an optional extra. It is a universal human right that must be protected.

Ultimately, the goal of unleashing the unprecedented opportunities ICT offers for development cannot be done by governments alone. Information societies will advance fastest where governments, private sector and civil society productively combine their interests.



The private sector – both domestic and international - has a major role to play. They have contributed most of the new products and innovations to the ICT revolution. Civil society has also a critical role to play in reaching remote and marginal populations, in connecting people to development solutions and in expanding dialogues among people and with governments.

UNDP has been proud to establish solid partnerships with civil society organizations through its ten-year Sustainable Development Networking Programme, as well as working with some of the largest global ICT companies, from Microsoft to Cisco Systems in the urgent challenge to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Today we have an historic opportunity to help turn rhetoric into action and make ICT work for development. If we fail to act now the Information Gap risks widening into an uncrossable gulf that increases global inequality and leaves the poor further behind. It is incumbent on all of us here today to build an inclusive Information Society that not only includes the world's poor but gives them an unprecedented opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty.