

Global Symposium for Regulators 2003

Universal Access Regulatory Best Practice Guidelines

We, the regulators participating in the 2003 Global Symposium for Regulators, have identified and propose the following best practice guidelines to achieving universal access to information and communication technology (ICT) services.

A. An enabling regulatory environment: the role of governments and regulators

1. The success of any universal access/service policy is dependent upon political support at the highest level that recognizes the role of ICTs as a tool for development.
2. It is essential that Regulators exist or be established where they do not yet exist, and that their key role in implementing universal access policies and promoting competition be recognized and reinforced.
3. A series of policy and regulatory reform measures can be taken to achieve universal access to ICTs. These include:
 - a. Formulating a national policy that identifies appropriate and realistic universal access/service objectives that take into account the differences between universal access—public access to ICTs—and universal service—household or private access to ICTs.
 - b. Including all citizens, regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic level or geographic location, in national universal access/service objectives.
 - c. Reviewing universal access/service policies, regulations and practices periodically to adapt to the evolving nature of ICT services and the needs of end users.

- d. Conducting periodic public consultations to the extent possible with stakeholders to identify their needs and modify accordingly universal access policies, regulation and practices.
 - e. Designing universal access policies, regulations and practices in order to create incentives for the private sector to extend universal access to communications services.
 - f. Establishing a fair and transparent telecommunication regulatory framework that promotes universal access to ICTs.
 - g. Adopting technologically neutral licensing practices enabling service providers to use the most cost-effective technology to provide services for end users.
 - h. Adopting a framework of interconnection rates linked to costs.
 - i. Reducing regulatory burdens to lower the costs of providing services to end users.
 - j. Developing an effective regulatory body responsible for implementing policies directed towards assuring the best quality reliable services at the most affordable prices that meet the needs of consumers—existing and future.
 - k. Promoting competition in the provision of a full range of ICT services to increase access, affordability, availability and use of ICTs.
4. Countries can use regulatory reform as the first step in achieving universal access, recognizing that further steps may be necessary to achieve ubiquitous access to ICTs, e.g., in rural areas or to users with special needs.
 5. Appropriate licensing schemes for rural service providers could be granted to meet the needs of un-served and under-served areas.

B. Access to information and communication infrastructures

6. The lessons learned from the initial experiences developing countries have achieved with mobile cellular services can be applied to a broader range of ICT services to foster universal access. These lessons include providing services in a competitive framework, using new technologies that offer both innovative services and affordable pricing options (e.g., pay as you go options such as pre paid cards) to a wide range of end users.
7. Other measures to promote affordable ICT equipment could include national manufacturing of ICT equipment, reduced customs tariffs and duties, and end-user loans to foster affordability of ICT equipment.
8. A full range of public access options can be developed, including the creation of public telecentres.

9. Local input (including the content useful for local populations) into projects increases their long-term financial sustainability.
10. Educating local people on the benefits of ICTs and their use increases their long-term financial sustainability

C. Guidelines in regard to finance and management of universal access policy

11. Universal service funds can be viewed as an option that complements regulatory reform and developed as a mechanism within a broader market-oriented approach to achieving universal access.
12. Universal service funds can be financed by a broad range of market players, managed by neutral bodies such as regulators, and be used to kick-start public access projects that meet the needs of the local community.
13. Governments may consider a full range of other financing mechanisms, including tax incentives for ICT providers and end users.
14. Competitive minimum subsidy auctions could be used, as an option, to reduce the amount of financing necessary for public access projects financed by a universal service fund.
15. Public access projects can be designed to achieve long-term financial self-sustainability, especially where consideration is given to innovative low-cost technologies.