

INTUG

Introduction INTUG welcomes the debate being conducted in preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and in 2005.

It is important to develop global, regional and national ICT action plans which are both realistic and bring demonstrable benefits. It must be possible to show those benefits by the 2005 Summit in Tunisia.

It is important to identify examples of best practice in national strategies (for developed and least developed countries), in specific markets (such as broadband and wireless) and also in specific circumstances (such as rural and remote areas).

It is important to develop rapid processes to allow countries to formulate a first version of such policies, based on global best practice, and so commence implementation, though with a view to evolution in the light of domestic and international experience.

It is essential to work to ensure that markets deliver the maximum access to telecommunications for businesses and for individuals. It is equally important to recognise when markets have not delivered this and to provide appropriate subsidies and grants in ways that do not unnecessarily distort markets.

INTUG is concerned at the resources being expended in the many preparatory meetings. There needs to be a positive outcome from the Summit, one that justifies the considerable energies and monies already used.

Economic growth The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations requires considerable economic resources, much of which must come from economic growth, both in the developed countries and more especially in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

Despite the problems associated with the collapse of the dot.com "bubble", the use of ICTs is a significant and possibly pre-eminent factor in economic growth. Innovation in the ICT supply industry drives broader economic growth when it is adopted and adapted into new products and services. In order to to maximise economic growth. governments must work to remove barriers to the adoption of

ICTs.

In particular, governments must eliminate market abuses in the telecommunications sector.

Dynamic markets

INTUG continues to believe that the best solution to the provision of telecommunications services lies in well-regulated competitive markets. These will provide the incentives for market players to offer better services at lower prices and to develop new and more innovative services. They will also allow new entrants.

Governments have a crucial role to play in ensuring that pro-competitive policies are in place and are working well. This requires rapid and accurate domestic reporting, combined with sound international comparisons; statistics, benchmarking and peer reviews.

The Doha Development Round is a vital opportunity for governments to open their markets to competition in a way where the benefits are widely accepted and can be reciprocated.

While some operators call for markets to be left "unregulated" this can be misleading. In a few developed countries, there may exist sufficiently resilient consumer protection and competition law to make sectoral regulation superfluous. Without such powerful safeguards, the absence of sectoral regulation almost invites abuse of dominance from incumbent operators and mobile oligopolies.

A well regulated telecommunications sector can be a leader in the reform of other sectors of the economy.

Public policy

It is essential that all countries have in place a national strategy for ICTs. This must reflect global best practice adapted to their national circumstances.

Such a strategy requires a wide ranging public debate involving all sectors of the economy and of society. It must not be dominated by market players, especially not by incumbent telecommunications operators which invariably protect their vested interests. It must include government, business and civil society, recognising that in many cases individuals and institutions will require support if they are to participate in these processes effectively. This requires capacity building for policy work at several levels.

In addition to national strategies there are significant benefits to be obtained from regional strategies such as e-ASEAN and eEurope.

At the global level there has been valuable work by the UN ICT Task Force which should continue.

It will be impossible to ensure the success of ICT strategies without appropriate

benchmarks to monitor their implementation and to inform the policy debate. Accurate and timely data, such as teledensity (fixed, mobile and broadband) are essential. Peer review is an effective way to share experiences.

Universal access

Universal access should be provided by economic encouragement and not by regulatory rigour. A strategy should be adopted to create an environment that accelerates availability of universal access to telecommunications services through economic and user-driven forces rather than through regulatory mechanisms.

Subsidies to make the use of available services affordable to those identified as needing assistance should be handled on the same political basis as other social services. They should not be funded through access charges, service funds or taxes on the telecommunications industry.

Telecommunications operators should be released from historical "obligations" to provide "universal service" under law, and should be offered the option of transferring the opportunity to another provider or competing for the business on a commercial basis.

The licensing of service providers must be contingent on commitments to technical functional and commercial interoperability on a transparent basis as a condition for providing service beyond the local environment.

The role of the ITU

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) plays a significant role as the leading inter-governmental body in telecommunications. However, it has struggled over many years to reform itself; a slow and painful process. The scope of the ITU remains too broad and it is too slow, because of its overly bureaucratic operations and the inability to achieve political consensus. The ITU is not alone in struggling with the problems of relevance and reform, the same difficulties face ICANN.

The ITU performs useful work in publishing statistical data, in the coordination of radio spectrum and in supporting least developed countries.

The WSIS must not be used by the ITU as an excuse to launch into new activities. Given its existing problems and the insurmountable difficulties it has in responding to market developments it is not suited for a wider role.

It is important to recognise the roles of other bodies such as UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCO and the World Bank. There is a need for coordination, but neither by a new organisation nor by the ITU.

INTUG

INTUG, the International Telecommunications Users Group (INTUG), is an association of national telecommunications users associations. INTUG was founded in 1974 to act as a single voice for users of telecommunications.

The mission of INTUG is to ensure that users have access to affordable, interoperable telecommunications services and that their voice is heard wherever telecommunications policy is decided. For over 25 years INTUG has argued for the introduction of competition in telecommunications and that all users must have

access to the benefits of such competition.

INTUG is a sector member of the International Telecommunication Union and participates in the work of APECTEL, CITEL, the European Union and OECD.

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