ITU Asia-Pacific Regional Development Forum

Asia-Pacific: *Smartly DIGITAL*

-Digital Intelligent Greener Innovative Transparent Accessible Living-

29 April 2013
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

BACKGROUND PAPER

Session 2: Digital Empowerment for All

Session objective: This Session aims to address the pressing issues and challenges related to promoting digital engagement for all, including people with special needs who would benefit from increased socio-economic inclusion in the digital society, thereby contributing to their social and economic empowerment, while exploring ICT-enabled solutions and potential regional initiatives for accessibility, availability and affordability for all.

1. Why Digital Empowerment and Who is "All"?

The benefits of the ICT revolution unfortunately are still unevenly distributed between the developed and developing countries and within societies. World leaders in several forums, e.g. the World Summit Information Society (WSIS) committed to turning this "digital divide into a digital opportunity for all, particularly for those who risk being left behind and being further marginalized"[1].

Digital empowerment is essentially extending the benefits of ICTs to all strata of the society, with special focus on people with special needs, in order that they will be able to fully, if not equally participate in all aspects of life, exercise their duties, contribute to and enjoy the rights and benefits as members of the society.

People living in poor rural and underserved areas

---

[1] WSIS Declaration of Principles: Building the Information Society: a global challenge in the new Millennium (http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html)

One of the key – and persistent question in the ICT for development debate is whether the global digital divide is widening or narrowing. Depending on the specific indicator and methodological framework chosen, the answer can be one or the other.

For example, looking at mobile telephony by level of development of countries, the majority of highly developed countries have reached saturation levels, with minimal annual growth. In developing countries, on the other hand, mobile-cellular subscriptions are still growing at double-digit rates, which implies that developing world is catching up and the divide is narrowing.

However, majority of the developed economies have become broadband-based information societies and are using the internet not only to connect people, but also things, in what has been called the Internet of Things[2]. Developing countries still face several challenges in order to keep up with this sort of technological progress.

Relatedly, in terms of internet usage, ITU estimates that 2/3 of the world's population and 3/4 of people in developing countries are still not using the internet. Majority of these people are living in **poor rural and underserved areas**. The Asia-Pacific region (at 32 percent) is at fourth place in terms of internet penetration compared to those of the other regions as demonstrated in the figure below.

Internet users by region, 2013

Per 100 inhabitants

Africa	Asia-Pacific	Arab States	CIS*	Americas	Europe
16	32	38	52	61	75
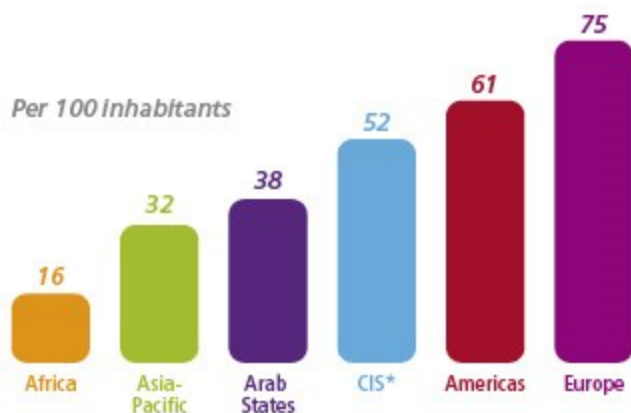
*Commonwealth of Independent States.

Source: ITU World Telecommunication/ ICT Indicators database.

Some of the barriers faced by developing countries in improving ICT/internet access and usage particularly in poor rural and underserved areas include the cost

---

[2] Measuring the Information Society 2012

of devices and connections, the low speed and quality of internet connections, the limited availability of ICT services outside major urban areas and more generally, inherent development challenges related to poverty and literacy levels. Acknowledging these challenges as well as the opportunities that they present, several developing countries are in the process of developing/ or have developed their own national ICT reforms and initiatives, e.g. right policies, regulations, legal framework and strategies that will open doors to new ICT applications and services, digital literacy, redefining scope of universal service and universal service fund, national broadband policy/plan among others, to address these issues.

Contributing to the ongoing national reforms, ITU recently launched the "m-Powering Development Initiative" which seeks to capitalize and build partnerships around the rapid growth and reach of mobile networks to strengthen the economic circumstances of individuals and communities to offer new opportunities for delivering ICT applications in health, education, agriculture , government, trade, commerce and others.

Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)

Out of the 7 billion world's population, over a billion persons around the world are living with some form of disability. A major milestone for the empowerment of persons with disabilities is the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 December 2006. The UN CRPD has been signed by 155 countries and ratified by 130 as of April 2013[3], meaning over two-thirds of ITU Member States have agreed to the requirements under Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities which defines ICT accessibility as an integral part of accessibility rights on par with transportation and the physical environment.

Over the past few years, world leaders, legislators, regulators, policy makers, civil society leaders and PWDs advocates have undertaken and will continue to undertake the important and complex task of implementing its dispositions into their national legislation, regulations and programs. ITU members, including policy makers, regulators and service providers have an important role to play to ensure that ICTs in their countries are accessible for persons with disabilities and to eliminate ICT accessibility barriers. .

---

[3] http://www.un.org/disabilities/index.asp

The Ageing Society

The number of older persons in the world aged 60 years and over is expected to increase from 600 million today to almost two billion in 2050. In the Asia and Pacific region older persons will constitute about 25 per cent of the total population in 2025 and possibly up to 35 per cent by 2050, from about 20 per cent at present. The social, economic and health implications of the growing population of older persons are profound and far-reaching. One major policy challenge is to recast ageing populations as a natural resource rather than a societal drain, and optimize these growing reservoirs of human capital and harness their potentials.

Preparing to meet the challenges of an ageing society requires innovative concepts, policies and programmes that can provide health and economic security, social services and promote independence, participation, and intergenerational solidarity. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) adopted by the Second World Assembly on Ageing (Madrid, 2002) emphasizes older persons' rights and participation in the development process. It urges actions in three key areas: (a) older persons and development, (b) advancing health and well-being into old age, and (c) ensuring enabling and supportive environments. At the regional level, the Macao Outcome Document adopted at the High-level Meeting on the Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Macao (2007) identified the need to ensure enabling and supportive environments and called for promotion of the use of technological advances, such as ICTs to enhance connectivity, communications and advocacy.

Women and Girls

In addition to the digital divide between developed and developing regions, an ongoing gender divide persists, where women and girls have less access to ICTs than do men and boys. If women remain excluded from ICT knowledge and services, they will become increasingly marginalized, the gender gap will grow, and many of the secondary benefits to be gained from women's empowerment and gender equality will fail to materialize.

Women play a key role in reducing poverty and promoting socio-economic development, for themselves, their families and their countries. Investing in women has a multiplier effect as they reinvest in their families and communities. ICTs are an essential tool for the socio-economic empowerment of women and girls. ICTs can provide women and girls the needed education and job training, promote literacy, improve information and knowledge on and access to health care,

livelihood and public services, among others, enable the exercise of legal rights, full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes and participation in government.

Youth

There are over 1.8 billion young people in the world today, 90 per cent of whom live in developing countries, where they tend to make up a large proportion of the population.

According to the ILO report, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2012, there are 75 million unemployed worldwide and youth unemployment rates are forecast to rise in all regions in the coming years (e.g. from 9.5% in 2012 to 10.4% in 2017 in East Asia, from 9.6% to 9.8% in South Asia and from 13.1% to 14.2% in South East Asia and the Pacific.

Therefore, it is necessary to take youth issues into consideration in the development agenda and policies of each country.

The rapid development and expansion of ICTs have given millions of people the potential to learn, publish and communicate on an unprecedented scale. The declining costs of the requisite ICTs, combined with vast changes to available infrastructure, have allowed many young people to take advantage of technology to do and achieve things never known to earlier generations.

While access to technology and associated contents and applications has significantly changed the lives of many young people in developed economies, the same is not generally true of those in less developed economies.

The young people represent the best promoters of ICTs and are the key contributors to building an inclusive Information Society. Therefore, this should be taken into account in programs and projects targeting the use and access of ICTs, not only as a way to widen ICTs opportunities for children and young people but also as a way to accelerate bridging the Digital Divide and to contribute to the development of the telecommunication sector as a whole.[4]

Indigenous Peoples

---

[4] A quote from Dr. Hamadoun Touré, Secretary General, ITU

Indigenous peoples are custodians of some of the most biologically diverse territories in the world. They are also responsible for a great deal of the world's linguistic and cultural diversity, and their traditional knowledge has been and continues to be an invaluable resource that benefits mankind.[5]

The situation of indigenous peoples – numbering more than 370 million in some 90 countries, continues to be critical: among others, indigenous peoples face systemic discrimination and exclusion from political and economic power; they continue to be over-represented among the poorest, the illiterate, the destitute; they are deprived of their resources for survival, both physical and cultural. In more modern versions of market exploitation, indigenous peoples see their traditional knowledge and cultural expressions marketed and patented without their consent or participation.[6]

In accordance with Resolution 46 (WTDC, 2006),Resolution 68 (WTDC 2010) and Resolution 185 (PP-2010), the BDT continues to develop and calls for partnerships to collaborate on activities that can facilitate the digital inclusion of indigenous peoples and use ICTs for capacity building for community development and to promote, preserve and protect   their heritage and cultural legacy.

2. Challenges and Opportunities for Partnerships

Much work remains to be done in advancing digital empowerment for all. They present several challenges which with clear understanding and serious commitments from stakeholders can turn the challenges into opportunities. These include the following:

- Implementing the dispositions of related Conventions, Resolutions, Declarations and Plans of Action into national legislation, regulations and programs;
- Increasing digital inclusion opportunities for people with special needs by identifying barriers to participation and designing and implementing reliable and affordable solutions to reduce, if not remove said barriers;

---

[5] Foreword by Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, to the State of the World's Indigenous Peoples

[6] State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, United Nations, New York, 2009. Please see http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/SOWIP_web.pdf.

- Sharing and promoting best practices on digital empowerment for people with special needs[7];
- Educating and raising public awareness on the importance of accessibility, ensuring that advances in technology include accessibility features for as many people as possible;
- Promoting and collaborating on universal design of appropriate and affordable technology(ies) for persons with special needs in the global community;
- Providing affordable and easy access to ICTs for people with special needs;
- Designing and implementing programmes and initiatives specifically addressing the unique requirements of people with special needs;
- Capacity building for people with special needs.

Several ITU initiatives have been undertaken to promote access to, as well as use and knowledge of, telecommunications and ICTs for people in poor rural and underserved areas, women and girls, children and youth, indigenous people, persons with disabilities and people living in rural, isolated and poorly served communities. Examples are shown in Table 1 below.

Initiatives	Action/Project	Link
People in poor rural and underserved areas	Connect a School, Connect a Community	http://www.connectaschool.org/
	Training Tools on the Use of ICTs for the Promotion of Livelihood of Rural Women	http://www.connectaschool.org/itu-training/3/172/en/Training_Remote_Rural_Users_ICT_Economic_Activities_Education_Government_Services/Training_Tools_Use_ICT_Promotion_Livelihood/
	mPowering Development Initiative	http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/emergencytelecoms/initiatives/m-Powering.pdf
Persons with Disabilities	Making Mobile Phones and Services Accessible for PwDs (English and Chinese).	http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/sis/PwDs/Documents/Mobile_Report.pdf
	Making TV Accessible (English and Chinese)	http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/sis/PwDs/Documents/ITU-G3ict%20Making_TV_Accessible_Report_November_2011.pdf
	G3ict ITU Toolkit for Policy Makers on e-Accessibility and Service Needs for PwDs	http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/sis/PwDs/Toolkit/index.html
	Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability	http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-T/accessibility/dcad/Pages/default.aspx
	Telecommunications Accessibility Checklist	http://www.itu.int/pub/T-TUT-FSTP-2006-TACL/en
Ageing	Telecommunications	http://www.itu.int/rec/T-REC-F.790-200701-I/en

---

[7] Some best practices are available at http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/sis/index.phtml.

Society	accessibility guidelines for older persons and persons with disabilities	
	Telecommunications Accessibility Checklist	http://www.itu.int/pub/T-TUT-FSTP-2006-TACL/en
	Supporting member states meet obligations under Article 9 of the UN Convention for Rights of Persons with disabilities	http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/sis/PwDs/index.phtml
Women and Girls	Girls in ICT Portal	http://girlsinict.org/
	Scholarships, training, internships, Tech Camps, Mentoring and Shadowing	http://girlsinict.org/
	Telecentre Women: Digital Literacy Campaign	http://women.telecentre.org/
Youth	Connect a School, Connect a Community	http://www.connectaschool.org/
	Protecting Children in Cyberspace: Child On-Line Protection (COP)	http://www.itu.int/osg/csd/cybersecurity/gca/cop/
	ITU Telecom Young Innovators Competition	http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Digital-Inclusion/Youth-and-Children/Pages/Young-Innovators-Competition.aspx
Indigenous Peoples	Study on Universal Access for the indigenous people	http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/indigenous/
	Regional Indigenous Workshop on ICT	http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/indigenous/events/Brasilia_aug_2008.html
Digital Inclusion (General)	Digital Inclusion Newslog	

Table 1: ITU Special Initiatives for Persons with Special Needs[8]

ITU is calling on partners to support ongoing and future digital empowerment initiatives and cooperation through various mechanisms.

3. Conclusions and Way Forward

To extend the benefits of ICTs to all, ICTs have to be made accessible to persons with special and unique needs, so these technologies constitute an opportunity and not a barrier. Every stakeholder has the responsibility to get involved in one way or another in programmes and initiatives to make ICT accessible to persons with special needs and to achieving equitable communications for everyone

---

[8] Table 1 is a non-exhaustive list.

This Session aims to discuss these challenges, which also offer unique opportunities to achieve digital empowerment for all and propose key priorities and initiatives for the Asia-Pacific region for next four years cycle of WTDC 2014.

* *

.