



INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

**WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT
CONFERENCE (WTDC-98)**

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PLENARY MEETING

Note by the Chairman

REFLECTIONS ON THE VALLETTA ACTION PLAN - A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of this contribution is to provide comments on the future directions and priorities for the Valletta Action Plan in an effort to ensure that activities pursuant to the WTDC are focused on issues involving the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development. Given the increasing recognition that ICTs are an essential element of economic growth and that telecommunications is the principal catalyst for access to a wide range of services based upon such technologies, it is clear that the issue of universal access and its relationship to development needs to be considered as a fundamental cornerstone of the programme of work to be adopted in Valletta. Moreover, as recent events have illustrated, such as the Global Knowledge 97 Conference co-sponsored by Canada and the World Bank, sustainable development can be achieved if the objectives implicit in the use of information and communication technologies, can be integrated and matched with the goals of other sectors of society, such as agriculture, health and education. This will increasingly necessitate the establishment of partnership arrangements involving planners and decision-makers from these sectors in the formulation and implementation of telecommunication-based solutions to development-related problems.

While the need to promote successful partnerships is implicitly recognized in the specification and implementation of the ITU's catalytic (and facilitating) role in working cooperatively and strategically with international, regional and bilateral development and financial agencies, it is becoming increasingly important for the ITU-D in particular - within the context of limited human and financial resources - to focus its energies on high priority areas which maximize opportunities for interaction and cooperation which include the private sector as well as non-governmental organizations. From Canada's perspective, such high priority areas should include the following:

1 Sector reform

Regulatory and policy reforms in the telecommunications and related information technology areas are progressing at an accelerated rate, due in large measure to the introduction of new technologies and services, the emergence of new players and the conclusion of a comprehensive multilateral

trade framework. While these reforms may be considered as essential to creating markets in which knowledge and information can begin to contribute to development, a key strategic challenge for the ITU-D is to establish and structure a work programme founded on universal access which serves to bridge the potential widening of the gap between the information rich and information poor as far as advanced telecommunication services and access to information are concerned. The emphasis within the ITU-D should be on establishing partnership with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and regional bodies such as CITELE and APEC who have active programmes in this area and where activities could be mutually reinforcing. Long term self-sustaining development within the competitive markets is an essential objective in Canadian development efforts. This approach does, however, represent a considerable challenge to decision makers in developing countries. The importance of partnering to promote universal access is therefore critical.

2 Capacity development

The institutional and human resources capacities of developing countries must be addressed if the challenges of the information society, sector reform and the new trade environment are to be met. An ability to sustain these capacities rests to a large extent on the building of human resources and the development of local competence. It is clear, furthermore, that policy makers, regulators and operators alike will require new skills and knowledge to define and manage the reform of the sector.

In general the focus has shifted from distance learning into a broader-based effort in supporting the reform of education from primary school to life-long learning consistent with the needs of an information-based society. The ITU-D, in cooperation with other interested parties, can assist in the formulation of strategies to directly address the need for capacity building (for example, joint sponsorship of training facilities and programmes with Members and extension of corporate training programmes), collaborative research, adaptation of R&D products to LDC development needs, and project participation.

3 Pilot projects

The ITU-D has been active in implementing community telecentre pilot projects demonstrating the concept of universal access. The ITU-D is urged to continue with this programme particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, focused on demonstrating how access to information can assist in the development of other sectors, e.g. agriculture, health and education. If successfully implemented, these demonstrations would eventually lead the governments of the host countries to develop appropriate policies including financing options for the extension of universal access. Demonstrations and pilots would be ideal vehicles for focusing on concrete deliverables and for establishing meaningful participation of business and private sectors.

4 Lessons learned/best practices

Within the context of partnering, it would be extremely useful for the ITU-D to create and maintain a database of best practices/lessons learned/success stories to be used as the basis for focusing the work to be undertaken during the next 4-year period. It is suggested that a systematic review and evaluation of the implementation of the Buenos Aires Action Plan could serve as a useful point of departure for the database, with all partners in development adding information on an ongoing basis. A programme of regional seminars and workshops drawing on practical examples/lessons learned would complement initiatives aimed at supporting sectoral reform and capacity building.

In addition, with the gradual growth of community telecentres providing access to large groups of people, a widely utilized indicator - teledensity, i.e. x lines per 100 persons - no longer reflects a true picture of a country's connectivity. This is an area which the ITU-D can investigate and reflect the results of its analyses in future World Telecommunication Development Reports.

Proposal

In order to capture the principal points outlined in this contribution, it is proposed that the attached draft Resolution be considered for adoption by the WTDC.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

**APPLICATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

The World Telecommunication Development Conference (Valletta, 1998),

considering

- a) that, in conformity with *considering also c)* of Resolution 24 (Kyoto, 1994), the availability of modern telecommunications is vital to the economic, social and cultural progress of all countries;
- b) that information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development are being increasingly recognized as an essential element of economic growth and that telecommunications is the principal medium for access to a wide range of services based upon such technologies;
- c) that the provisions of Resolution 31 (Kyoto, 1994) highlighted the important participatory, and not merely infrastructural, role played by telecommunications in the development of agriculture, health, education, transport, industry, human settlement, trade, transfer of information for social welfare and in the general economic and social progress of developing countries;
- d) that it will become increasingly necessary to establish partnership arrangements involving planners and decision-makers from these sectors in the formulation and implementation of telecommunication-based solutions to development-related problems,

recognizing

that, given the limited availability of human and financial resources, it will become increasingly critical for ITU-D in particular to focus its energies on activities which maximize opportunities for interaction and cooperation with other international and regional organizations, as well as the private sector including non-governmental organizations,

recommends

1 that, among the most important activities, are the following: the identification of options for sector reform, development of a compendium of lessons learned and best practices, establishing a framework for the development of the organizational and human resources capacities of the developing countries, and the implementation of community telecentre pilot projects demonstrating how access to information can assist in the development of other sectors such as those outlined in *considering c)* above;

2 that these activities, formulated within the context of the development of partnership arrangements, form an important basis for work associated with the implementation of the Valletta Action Plan.
