



INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

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PLENARY MEETING

Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau

A SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

1 Introduction

Resolution 11 of the Kyoto Plenipotentiary Conference resolved "that a significant part of any surplus income over expenditure derived from the activities of TELECOM should be used for specific telecommunication development projects, primarily in the least developed countries". An amount of CHF 17.5 million has thus been earmarked for telecommunication development projects which are to be implemented in the 1997-2001 period in the following four general programme areas:

- 1) human resource development;
- 2) infrastructure development;
- 3) application of new technologies; and
- 4) assistance to countries in special need.

The choice of projects to be implemented is being guided by three factors: their potential long-term sustainable impact; their potential to attract participation of partners in funding and execution; and their potential to become self-sufficient in the short to medium term. One of the primary objectives of this special development initiative is to generate, through partnerships, contributions and commitments which will facilitate implementation of these projects. The ITU commitment of funds to each project is aimed at attracting other partners and raising additional contributions, both in cash and in kind.

2 Human resource development

It is widely recognized that all countries need highly trained human resources to facilitate the transition to the new telecommunication environment. The increased use of new technologies, the move towards corporatization and competition, and the separation of regulatory functions from operational services require policy, regulatory, managerial and technological expertise. In order to develop and strengthen the capability to generate advanced level policy, regulatory and managerial

expertise in developing countries, an amount of CHF 8 million has been allocated towards the establishment of four Centres of Excellence (two in Africa: ESMT in Senegal, AFRALTI in Kenya; one in the Americas Region; and another one in the Asia-Pacific Region).

The primary mandate of these Centres of Excellence will be to train policy makers, regulators and managers in the development of national sector priorities and regulations, as well as senior corporate managers in the management of telecommunications networks and services. The Centres could also serve as regional focal points for training, professional development, and research and information. It is of paramount importance that these Centres avoid all possible duplication with existing training and professional development initiatives in the regions where Centres of Excellence are being proposed.

In keeping with Recommendation 5 of the 1996 African Regional Telecommunications Development Conference on the improvement of human resources management and development in Africa, plans are under way to transform into Centres of Excellence two existing African training institutes, l'Ecole Supérieure Multinationale des Télécommunications (ESMT) in Dakar, Senegal, and the African Advanced Level Telecommunications Institute (AFRALTI) in Nairobi, Kenya. CHF 2 million has been set aside for each of these two proposed Centres of Excellence. It should be remembered that both of these training Institutes benefitted for many years from support provided by the ITU and the UNDP.

At l'ESMT, five studies have been carried out over the past few months to confirm the feasibility of the project, and a project document is currently in the process of being finalized. The Governing Council of l' ESMT is scheduled to meet towards the end of April 1998, at which time it is expected to formally approve the transformation of the Institute into a Centre of Excellence.

A BDT-recruited project manager has been in Nairobi since November 1996 to assist AFRALTI management, Kenyan government authorities, current members of the Institute and potential new members in assessing the feasibility of establishing a Centre of Excellence which would serve anglophone countries in Africa. Both the AFRALTI Governing Council and Ministers of the Southern Africa Transport and Communications Commission (SATCC) have agreed in principle to cooperate with the ITU in pursuing the Centre of Excellence concept.

In the Americas Region, much effort has been put into working with the Regional Telecommunication Organization, CITELE, and with its member countries, to further develop the concept of a Centre of Excellence in the Region. The ITU commitment of CHF 2 million to this project will form the nucleus on which additional contributions will be raised. The March 1998 CITELE Conference adopted a resolution which calls upon the ITU and CITELE to cooperate in the establishment of this Centre of Excellence. The concept which seems to be favoured by countries in this Region is one of a network of existing training institutions, each of which would be linked electronically and would generate advanced-level policy, regulatory and managerial expertise.

The proposed Centre of Excellence in the Asia-Pacific Region is very much at the same stage of development as the one in the Americas Region. CHF 2 million has been allocated to this project, and discussions have been held with the APT and APEC, as well as with various interlocutors from this Region. Comments received so far from potential sponsors and participants from this Region indicate a preference for a Centre of Excellence network concept, which would build on knowledge-based expertise and resources currently being developed by national and regional entities, and which could be linked electronically for the purposes of access to and dissemination of this knowledge.

While each of the proposed four Centres of Excellence are at different stages of development, progress has been achieved over the past few months, especially in the area of institutional support for the projects and in the formulation and development of similar, yet different, projects which take into account and reflect the particularities and specific needs of the regions concerned.

3 Infrastructure development

A CHF 4 million allocation has been made to a core fund to attract other funding from various partners, in order to modernize the PANAFTTEL Network in Africa, which is home to 33 of the world's 48 least developed countries. The objective of this initiative is to enlist the commitment and cooperation of national governments, regional and international organizations and the private sector, with a view to modernizing the PANAFTTEL network.

To this end, and in keeping with Resolution 4 of the 1996 African Regional Telecommunication Development Conference, which calls upon the ITU and other development partners to undertake the revitalization of the PANAFTTEL network, work is proceeding, within the overall CHF 4 million allocation, on two projects, AFRITEL, and Industrialization Africa.

AFRITEL aims to strengthen the capabilities of national telecommunication operators to develop and better manage, operate and maintain the African telecommunications networks. This project will attract international expertise in the areas of integrated planning of telecommunications, traffic flows, the gradual digitalization of networks, maintenance and rehabilitation, and tariffs.

Industrialization Africa's main objective is the transfer of know-how to African countries on the creation and operation of manufacturing at national, sub-regional and regional levels in the telecommunications sector. The first phase of the project aims to establish the status of telecommunications equipment manufacturing in Africa. The second phase will focus on the development and implementation of a work programme for the establishment of manufacturing facilities in Africa.

4 Application of new technologies

The third component of the Special Development Initiative, to which CHF 4 million has been allocated, envisages a series of pilot projects which will demonstrate the feasibility of using new technologies to deliver information and telecommunications services, thereby extending the benefits of telecommunication technology to the public. Projects will be undertaken in such fields as health care delivery, transportation, tourism, agriculture, trade, efficient government operations, good governance and education. In the selection and execution of these pilot projects, the ITU will play a catalytic role, bringing together partners who have the funds, the skills, the facilities, and who are willing to cooperate with the ITU in the management and implementation of these projects.

As of the first week of March 1998, four different series of projects had been approved and were being implemented, within the overall CHF 4 million budget allocation. The first of these is in the area of distance learning courses, where, as part of the Buenos Aires Action Plan (BAAP) programme no. 2, the ITU is creating a cooperative network of partners on the Information Highway. By pooling resources in universities, training institutes, financing bodies, governments, regional organizations and telecoms operators, the BDT Human Resource Development Division operates a brokerage service of distance learning courses to reinforce training and human resource development in developing countries. The Virtual Training Centre (VTC), which operates on the

Web, provides access to more than 500 courses. With the help of a number of external partners, the Virtual Training Centre will launch during 1998 various pilot courses including a course on the training of trainers in distance training techniques and electronic fora on regulatory issues, quality management and marketing. The Virtual Training Centre will become a major component of the Global Telecommunication University/Global Telecommunication Training Institute (GTU/GTTI).

The second series of pilot projects, entitled Multipurpose Community Telecentres (MCTs), aims to develop and test the MCT model to provide access to information and communication technologies in the rural areas of five different African countries (Uganda, Tanzania, Benin, Mali and Mozambique). These projects will enable rural communities in these countries to access not only local information and knowledge, but also information outside these communities to enhance local capacity to improve health care delivery, education, agriculture and the dissemination of government information and other public services. The pilot projects are being implemented as a joint effort of the ITU, UNESCO and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), under the UN System-wide Special Initiative for Africa, and as a result of Buenos Aires Action Plan programme no. 9 on integrated rural development.

In the third series of initiatives, nine pilot projects are being undertaken in the area of telemedicine. These projects, which will be carried out in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Venezuela, Bhutan, Myanmar, Georgia and Malta, are intended to demonstrate the potential benefits of using different approaches in the introduction of telemedicine services, to show that using existing networks in developing countries do make telemedicine projects feasible, and to establish telemedicine collaboration groups or alliances in different regions of the world.

Finally, the most recent initiative to be undertaken within the Application of New Technologies component of the Special Initiative is a pilot project on the application of interactive television to distance education. This project, developed in partnership with UNESCO, has created tools of particular value to continuing education and in-service training, where high levels of interactivity bring considerable benefits. At present, two projects, derived from this pilot project, have been undertaken with the objective of enhancing education through the improvement of the quality and capabilities of teachers in the primary grades, a pressing need in many developing countries. A project in India links 15 training centres in each of two states, creating virtual classrooms in each of essentially unlimited capacity and with a minimum of barriers to access. A project in Morocco similarly links 15 sites in 5 provinces, many of them in isolated, rural areas to the training Centre in Rabat.

5 Assistance to countries in special need

In accordance with Resolutions 32, 33 and 34 of the Kyoto Plenipotentiary Conference, which called upon the ITU to provide assistance to countries facing special needs, the Special Development Initiative has earmarked CHF 1.5 million for projects to be undertaken, in cooperation with other agencies and bodies, in Palestine, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liberia, Somalia and Rwanda. The needs of the countries in the Caribbean and South Pacific Regions in terms of emergency standby telecommunications services will also be taken into account. While no specific project has yet been approved in this particular component of the Special Initiative, the ITU has been successful in using regular budget funds to implement a certain number of activities in some of these countries.