A Joint Statement from the Education, Academia and Research Taskforce and the Telecentres Caucus

Presented by Andy Carvin, Digital Divide Network
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Madame Chair, thank you for the opportunity to speak.

We, the members of civil society's education, academia and research taskforce and the telecentres caucus, have come together to address the importance of the proper financing of educational ICTs and human capacity building. ICTs can be a key tool in achieving universal primary education, while wired schools and non-formal learning institutions such as telecenters can play a major role in addressing the development agenda of the MDGs.

When considering appropriate financing mechanisms for bridging the digital divide, do not neglect the role that schools, universities and non-formal educational institutions such as telecentres play as a community hub for building local knowledge, and integrating marginalized communities into the information society.

Schools, universities, telecentres, libraries and other learning institutions all have an existing infrastructure that focus on the future -- the potential of our children and young people. If properly financed, this infrastructure can serve as a backbone for bridging the digital divide. These institutions offer direct benefit to the young people of the world, who cannot afford to be left on the wrong side of the digital divide; their long-term wellbeing and prosperity are at stake.

However, it is not enough to finance infrastructure initiatives only- educational capacity building such as professional development for teachers and curriculum development must also be addressed simultaneously. Learners must have access to curricula that is linguistically and culturally appropriate, including open courseware.

Moreover, there is a natural synergy that exists between ICT-enabled schools, telecentres and similar institutions. Schools should be financed so they too may serve as community-based telecentres, while telecentres can serve as educational institutions in themselves. This notion of multi-purposing should be addressed when making decisions on investing funds to bridge the digital divide.

As digital divide initiatives are financed, communities must have a vested interest in the success of these institutions if they are to succeed in the long-term. Financing models that embrace bottom-up approaches will help foster educational ICT initiatives that address the development needs of each community.

We also encourage further investment in the development of local open courseware initiatives. Open courseware offers an educational model for promoting open access, cultural and linguistic diversity, and a spectrum of teaching and learning styles. These initiatives should be networked for worldwide capacity building.

With these ideas in mind, we offer the following amendments to the chapter regarding financing mechanisms:

Paragraph 14: Change the phrase "capacity building" to educational and human capacity building;

Paragraph 15, last clause: change to: ...as a tool for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Paragraph 21, last sentence: change the phrase "poverty reduction strategies" to "education and poverty reduction strategies";

Paragraph 23a: Change to: ICT capacity-building programmes, materials, tools, educational funding, curriculum such as open courseware, and specialized training initiatives, especially for regulators, educators and other public sector employees and organizations.

Paragraph 24h, end of the last clause, change to: "especially in the public sector, including education."

Thank you very much.