

Mr Chairman. I speak on behalf of the Community Media Working Group.

I thank you for the opportunity to address the question of financing mechanisms for ICT for development. And let me say, first, that it would be better if we were to speak about Communication for Development. For the question is not just one of technologies but also, and more importantly, of people. It is not only a question of access, infrastructure and connectivity, but also one of language, literacy, education and human capacity.

When we speak about Communication for Development in the least developed countries we are not only, or even primarily, speaking about access to the Internet, but also about radio and telephony – oral media, more accessible, more widespread and less expensive.

One of the findings which should have been given much higher profile in the report of the Task Force on Funding Mechanisms, is the specific and crucial role of community media in reaching out to the poorest and most marginalized communities. This is a finding which was endorsed last year at the United Nations Round Table on Communications for Development held in Rome, in September, and reinforced at the WSIS thematic conference on Media in Africa and the Arab World, held in Marrakech, in November.

Investment in community media has grown significantly in recent years. We welcome, for example, the commitments made to community media by the Swiss government at the Geneva Summit, in partnership with UNESCO and the governments of Mozambique, Mali and Senegal. We welcome the continuing support for community media that other donor governments have made, such as Sweden, France and the United Kingdom, and by other multilateral development agencies including the UNDP and the World Bank.

However we also believe that there is not only room for improvement in existing funding mechanisms but that a new international fund for Community Media would have immediate and strategic impact in the contribution of communications to the achievement of the Millennium Development goals. In our experience, approaches to investment in community media are not always flexible to respond to need and to demand when it is expressed. There has been success in small project-based investment but new approaches are needed to address the challenge of scaling-up. We see a degree of competition among donors which is not always helpful. Better coordination is needed. We see a lack of experience among some donors and some international NGOs in supporting capacity building at the local level. More needs to be done to consult with civil and involve civil society and community-based organisations in planning and implementation.

Specifically, we propose, as a first step, the establishment of a Community Radio Fund for Africa. What we are proposing is a donor-civil society partnership in which funding commitments are matched with technical expertise and know-how. We are proposing a fund which can act quickly and flexibly with the minimum of bureaucracy. We are proposing a fund that would give priority to the needs expressed by local community organisations and would support community-led initiatives. Such a fund would require investment at a modest level over a period of ten years from 2005 to 2015. We believe the results would have a measurable and positive impact on the Millennium Development Goals. We call upon governments and other stakeholders to work with us to establish such an initiative and to do so within the framework of the World Summit on the Information Society.