CHAPTER SIX

Towards an Information Society for all

6.1 Conclusions

The World Summit on the Information Society made a strong commitment towards building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society for all[1], where people can access and utilize information and knowledge. This Report responds to the call of the *Geneva Plan of Action* for monitoring the WSIS implementation and follow-up, with 'analytical work on policies and their implementation' and that 'appropriate indicators and benchmarking … should clarify the magnitude of the digital divide in both its domestic and international dimensions'[2]. In response, this Report has introduced the Digital Opportunity Index (DOI) as a tool to measure progress in building the Information Society, and showed how it can be used to track the key dynamics driving the Information Society worldwide.

This Report explains how the DOI measures digital opportunity or people's ability to access and use ICTs, in its structure of:

- **Opportunity,** or people's potential for using ICT, in terms of coverage and affordability (including mobile and Internet price data);
- **Infrastructure,** the basic framework for accessing the Information Society, in both fixed and mobile means of access; and
- **Utilization,** to capture people's participation in the Information Society in their usage of ICTs, including innovative technologies such as broadband and mobile Internet.

The DOI measures digital opportunity for 180 economies to date, the widest coverage yet achieved by any composite index that seeks to monitor the development of the Information Society. It has a flexible, modular structure that can be broken down into separate scores for a country's fixed and mobile sectors. Furthermore, in addition to indicators monitoring the quantity of access, it also includes a number of technological advancement ratios measuring quality of access (for example, the ratio of broadband subscribers as a proportion of total Internet subscribers). This means that the DOI is capable of capturing and measuring phenomena such as technological leapfrogging and the rapid growth in mobile communications. The DOI is thus development-oriented, as it can evaluate developing countries on their strengths, in mobile telephony and wireless communications, rather than their weaknesses in the (absence of) fixed-line structure, often the main focus of other indices.

The Report shows how the DOI can be used to enrich and inform policy-making, on several levels. The DOI can be used to evaluate discrepancies and inequalities in access between geographical regions (the international digital divide) and regions within a country (the domestic digital divide) at a point in time. This means that the DOI is capable of monitoring the extent of existing inequalities, and can help policy-makers in their efforts to address differences and inequality in access to ICTs.

This Report has also tracked the shifting dynamics of the Information Society over time using the DOI. Time series data have been developed for 2001-2005 for 40 key economies. This analysis shows that the economies with the fastest growth in digital opportunity are the developing giants of China, India, Brazil and Russia[3]. However, the profile of development is different. China and Russia have experienced strong growth in infrastructure, whilst India has made strong gains in the accessibility and affordability of telecommunications. Brazil has succeeded in strengthening all three aspects to digital opportunity—opportunity, infrastructure and utilization—implying rounded and balanced development of the Information Society. Through its analysis of different indicators, the DOI can track changes in the shifting dynamics of digital opportunity, to allow policy-makers to prioritise particular aspects of policy in specific countries.

Furthermore, the DOI is a versatile and forward-looking index. It includes the innovative, new technologies from which future digital opportunities will grow, including broadband and mobile Internet access. This Report analyses the strong growth in broadband (Chapter three) and mobile Internet (Chapter two). Far from being the preserve of developed countries, more and more countries are enjoying the benefits of higher-speed access in commercially available broadband and mobile Internet. Importantly, the prices

of telecommunications (mobile, Internet and broadband services) are, on average, falling. However, developed countries generally enjoy greater and more varied data services, at faster speeds and lower cost. The strong gains in mobile telephony by the developing world evidenced by the DOI offer the prospect of greater access to telecommunications by more of the world's population, but the digital divide continues to evolve in new ways. The digital divide can no longer be measured only in terms of basic connectivity, but is taking on new dimensions in speed, capacity and mobility of access.

Chapter four considers the changing policy landscape in the goals of universal access/service, affordability, digital inclusion, broadband and wireless access, amongst others. It shows how policy-makers can use the DOI to inform policy-making and policy design to achieve the WSIS goals. It demonstrates different applications of the DOI for analysing digital gaps between regions at the national and international levels, for assessing gender gaps and for monitoring digital inclusion.

The DOI is a useful policy tool that can be adapted to assess all of data requirements. The DOI has been used in this Report to:

- Analyse digital opportunity throughout the continent of Africa;
- Perform a benchmark comparison of India's performance relative to neighbouring countries;
- Examine regional disparities in digital opportunity in Brazil; and
- Identify the extent of the gender gap in the Czech Republic.

The DOI is not an abstract mathematical construction, but has real 'hands-on' applications for policy-makers, particularly in the context of the commitments made by governments at the World Summit. The chapter also outlines indications for next steps in the application of the DOI for policy-making, as it is intended to apply the DOI in new ways, based on the feedback received from this first edition.

Following on from this policy analysis, this Report also reviews current implementation and efforts to realise the Information Society in the light of the WSIS goals. During the WSIS, all stakeholders committed themselves to remain fully engaged to ensure implementation and follow-up of the outcomes and commitments of the WSIS. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships play a key role in this process. As the organisation with the lead managerial role in the World Summit, the ITU is actively involved in its implementation and follow-up and has committed to working closely with all stakeholders to realise the WSIS goals.

Chapter five reviews progress in implementation since the conclusion of the Summit in Tunis to extend the benefits of ICTs to more people, new communities and different cultures. It highlights some of the projects and initiatives that are underway around the world to make this happen. It gives examples of real-world, practical initiatives by a range of all stakeholders. The World Summit has catalysed implementation and real progress has been made towards building a richer and more inclusive Information Society, in which everyone can participate.

6.2 Next Steps

This inaugural edition of the *World Information Society Report*s is the first of an annual series of reports tracking progress in building the Information Society. The DOI will be updated annually and will continue to be developed to meet policy needs and the requirements of governments and policy-makers. In this context, feedback on this first edition is very welcome in helping to hone the DOI as a tool and to improve its usefulness in different policy contexts.

One important direction for future work is in the development of a matrix, to establish linkages among policy goals, performance and the regulatory environment. A policy matrix would allow the relationships between performance and development strategies of a country to be analysed. The DOI will also be used as a frame of reference to evaluate progress towards specific goals, including those contained in the *Geneva Plan of Action* for 2015, or countries' own regional and national targets for bridging the digital divide.

Another important step is to improve the accessibility of the index, by continuing to develop the DOI website[4] and helping policy-makers to use the DOI for their own purposes, for instance by designing appropriate questionnaires, submitting the latest data, setting policy targets on the basis of peer comparisons, or combining the DOI with other indices of socio-economic development.

ITU and the Korea Agency for Digital Opportunity and Promotion (KADO) are working to develop a policy toolkit for the DOI through an open and participatory collaborative process. This will include the involvement and input of other stakeholders, including governments, other international organisations, business and civil society representatives. The policy toolkit will be further discussed at a workshop hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea, to be held in Seoul, 31 August-1 September 2006.

Finally, future editions of this Report will use and apply the DOI to track the growth of digital opportunity and progress towards a rich and inclusive Information Society around the world, in line with the WSIS goals.

Endnotes

[1] Opening paragraphs of the *Geneva Declaration of Principles* and the *Tunis Commitment*.

[2] *WSIS Geneva Plan of Action*, excerpts from para 28.

[3] Termed the 'BRIC' economies by some analysts.

[4] See www.itu.int/doi.