

Aidworld Information Technologies

The Summit must consider both the movement of the digital divide, as technologies of wealthy countries advance, and the tendency to rely on 'trickle down technology' that merely moves the divide without ever closing it.

Inevitably, future developments in technology will ensure that the accessibility of information in wealthy countries remains far in advance of poorer regions of the world. The divide should, therefore, not be viewed as static, but as dynamic and shifting and any solution needs to evolve quickly, tracking changes in communications technology.

In eradicating information poverty, the greatest immediate need is for the written word and not music, video or images. Text can be harvested from the web, converted into its simplest format and sent over slow and unreliable connections cheaply, quickly and reliably. This would be of immediate and almost immeasurable use to those working in remote areas and difficult circumstances.

The current proposals for rapid information exchange are predominantly hardware based and are, as such, costly to implement and costly to change in the future. These solutions tend not to adapt to the changes in the digital divide and are based on technologies originally designed for developed environments, rather than dedicated solutions for providing basic services to information poor regions:

1. Broadband cable/satellite infrastructure
2. Wireless networks
3. WAP technology
4. Local nodes of communication (Hot Spots)

Each proposal suffers from the following problems as a means of bridging the digital divide:

- High cost to build and maintain a global network.
- Long time-frame before becoming globally viable.
- The most unstable regions will be left until last.
- Driven by the concerns of wealthy countries.
- Of questionable use in poorer countries.
- Limited networks will produce digital divides within individual countries.

A fifth solution is made possible by using software to optimise existing landlines and mobile communications networks. This opportunity should be exploited as the cheapest and most immediate remedy for the problems of the digital divide.

5. Lightweight software solutions
 - Cheap to implement and maintain
 - Quick to develop and distribute globally

- Can deliver information access to the most needy communities first.
- Dedicated solutions, for developing environments, using dedicated technology.
- Offers the tools for communities to adapt and build their own solutions.
- Ensures that the written word, on the internet, can be available anywhere

The weakness of the web over poor land-lines is largely a result of the http protocol. Other protocols can be used to develop software that improves the robustness of information transfer over existing communications networks.

Software solutions require a much lower investment and, as such, can relieve information poverty in more unstable areas whilst remain dynamic and evolving to meet technological changes. Should technologies change, software can be updated to track the movement of the digital divide and introduce new features.

The solution proposed by Aidworld Information Technologies is to develop open-source software that makes written information, available on the internet, accessible over the poorest communication networks.
