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**Building an enabling environment for access to the Internet**

* *What are the elements of an enabling environment to promote Internet connectivity?*
* *What are the elements of an enabling environment to promote an affordable Internet?*
* *What are the elements of an enabling environment to promote the quality of access to the Internet?*
* *What are the elements of an enabling environment to build confidence and security in the use of the Internet?*
* *What is the role of Governments in building an enabling environment?*

**Introduction**

1. The UK Government welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the discussion of the Council Working Group (Internet) on the elements of an enabling environment. In recent years we have seen unprecedented innovation and expansion in digital technology and in the application of technology to all aspects of life. It has brought new opportunities for economic, social, cultural and personal development. It is still the case, however, that billions of people still lack affordable access to the Internet and are excluded from the benefits it can bring. Building an enabling environment is fundamentally important in order to promote access to the Internet and bridge the digital divide.
2. The ten-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society called for a special focus on actions that improve the enabling environment for ICTs, including education and capacity-building. The outcome document of the review recognised that significant gains in connectivity and sustainable development have been facilitated by approaches such as:
* mainstreaming of ICTs in school curricula
* open access to data
* the fostering of competition
* the creation of transparent, predictable, independent and non-discriminatory regulatory and legal systems
* proportionate taxation and licensing fees
* access to finance
* facilitation of public- private partnerships
* multi-stakeholder cooperation
* national and regional broadband strategies
* efficient allocation of the radio frequency spectrum
* infrastructure- sharing models
* community-based approaches and public access facilities

The UK strongly supports this view and believes that these approaches can also be seen as key elements in promoting affordable access to the Internet.

1. These questions need to be considered in the context of sustainable development more generally and the global community’s ambition to deliver economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection and to leave no one behind. We also need to recognise the particular challenges faced in least developed countries, in areas such as food security, health and education, water and sanitation and other basic infrastructure such as reliable energy supply. Clearly these have a fundamental impact on the environment for access to the Internet.
2. Beyond these basic development issues, however, experience has demonstrated that there are clear elements that need to be in place in order to build an enabling environment, particularly in terms of the market environment for investment. The private sector plays by far the greatest role in investment in infrastructure and service provision and it is this market environment that is critically important.

**Connectivity, quality and affordability**

1. Connectivity, quality and affordability are driven by a competitive market environment. It can undermine competition if government owns companies which provide services to end users. Instead, there needs to be a simple and straightforward licensing process, with no legal barrier to market entry.
2. Competition is important at every layer of connectivity. Having multiple international connectivity options from multiple providers is the best opportunity for the market to provide abundant and affordable access for users.
3. It is important to remove barriers to crossing national borders with network infrastructure and traffic and there should be access at reasonable rates to international gateway or cable. Regulators should be ready and able to tackle anti-competitive behaviour.
4. The role of regulators is particularly critical. Regulation should be clear, transparent and predictable and regulators should have the authority and capacity to enforce regulation. Regulators need to be independent of government and business and in order to ensure that independence they should have adequate and stable funding. A transparent and efficient framework for managing radio spectrum is also essential.
5. The processes for building and sharing infractructure are also important and wherever possible this should be coordinated with other infrastructure work (on roads, for example). Sharing backbone infrastructure can offer significant benefits.
6. Public funding can play an important role, but should be used to support public infrastructure where there are clear market failures. Public funding should be used through open and competitive tendering processes and the capacity it delivers should be available to all in a non-discriminatory way. Universal Service funds can also play an important role, provided that the funds are collected and distributed fairly and transparently.
7. Costs and therefore affordability can also be improved by improving the efficiency of traffic exchange between local networks, for example through community-led Internet Exchange Points, and also increasing the local hosting of content, whether that is by local platforms or content from others made available through Content Delivery Networks.
8. Taxation of equipment, services and consumer goods should be proportionate and should not treat ICTs as “luxury goods”. Increased access to the Internet leads to increased economic development and drives greater tax revenues from the economy overall.
9. Regulation and investment measures should be transparent and subject to public consultation and they should have clear aims and goals against which they can be measured. The collection of accurate market data and statistics is important – wherever possible this should be made public. The ITU Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development can play a helpful role in this area.
10. The ITU can play an important role in developing capacity and spreading best practice in these issues. There should be a stronger focus on the valuable role that the D-Sector plays in supporting governments and regulators in developing countries to put in place the elements of an enabling environment. Other initiatives, such as those brought together in the Global Connect initiative, are also playing critical roles in encouraging development.

**Confidence and security**

1. All stakeholders have roles and responsibilities to build confidence and security. No one stakeholder can achieve confidence and security on its own: all need to work together. Individual users should behave responsibility online and take basic steps to protect their security, for example using effective passwords that are regularly updated. Companies and other organisations have a responsibility to keep their customers’ data safe and to take steps to protect themselves from viruses and malware. The technical community and technology companies play vital roles in designing secure devices and software. Governments have roles putting in place an effective and proportionate domestic legal framework and accountable enforcement mechanisms. It is important that citizens can trust the actions of governments and that legal and regulatory frameworks are fully compliant with international human rights obligations. Governments also have a role in raising awareness, training and capacity building. Developing countries in particular need support and capacity-building to address the particular challenges they face.

Examples from the UK

1. The UK Government, for example, has worked with the industry to develop the “Cyber Essentials” scheme. This is aimed at raising awareness in UK companies of the importance of cyber-security and guide them in protecting themselves against cyber-threats. It lists five technical controls (access control; boundary firewalls and Internet gateways; malware protection; patch management and secure configuration) that organisations should have in place. Properly implementing the Cyber Essentials scheme will protect against the vast majority of common cyber threats.
2. Cyber Essentials documents are free to download and any organisation can use the guidance to implement essential security controls. Organisations that have been independently assessed or tested attain a Cyber Essentials certification badge, which helps them demonstrate to their customers, partners or clients that they take cyber security seriously.
3. The UK Government also supports the Cyber Streetwise campaign, which gives the public the advice they need to protect themselves from cyber criminals. Targeted messaging delivered through social media and advertising and in partnership with businesses gives advice on passwords, installing security software and downloading the latest software updates. Adopting these behaviours will provide small businesses and individuals with protection against cyber crime.
4. Cyber Streetwise is currently supported by 109 cross-sector partners, including the police and businesses in the retail, leisure, travel and professional services sectors. In 2015/16 an estimated 10 million adults and 1 million small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK stated they were more likely to maintain or take up key cyber security behaviours as a result of the Cyber Streetwise campaign.

**The role of governments**

1. Governments have a range of important roles in creating an enabling environment, which can be summarised as follows:
* to empower users by promoting access to information (including consumer information and basic cyber security), education, training and skills
* to ensure a fair and consistent human rights compliant domestic legal framework, by ensuring transparency of legal process and accountability for government decisions, providing equitable civil processes for dispute resolution and ensuring there is a robust framework for independent, predictable and transparent regulation
* to promote investment in infrastructure, by ensuring proportionate taxation and licensing fees, facilitating public/private partnerships, managing open procurement processes and providing coordination with other public infrastructure projects
* to open up policy-making processes to participation by businesses, civil society and individuals, with transparent, evidence-based policy developed in consultation with stakeholders and promoting new partnerships
1. Governments also need to allow other stakeholders to play their roles. Often it is better for government to step back and allow the market to operate without unnecessary interference or to encourage self-regulation. Where governments do need to act, the most effective approach for government can often be to set and monitor a framework within which other stakeholders can operate.
2. In some places, demand-led approaches are also important. Some people may not see a need to connect to the Internet if they do not see the value it can bring to them. Local language content and locally relevant services and applications have a particular importance here and governments can play a role in promoting them, including by putting government services and information online.
3. The UK has sought to be a pioneer in putting government services and information online. The [GOV.UK](http://gov.uk/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) programme has made additional government services available online, and improved the usability of existing online services, leading to increased adoption and reduced costs for both citizens and government. Today [GOV.UK](http://gov.uk/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) has over 11m visitors a week, almost half of which are on mobile phones or tablets, with over 2.4 billion transactions conducted online each year.

**Conclusion**

1. All of these elements of an enabling environment have been demonstrated to have a significant impact on access to the Internet. The Alliance for an Affordable Internet in particular has done excellent work to show how countries which adopt these approaches can improve access and affordability. Its annual Affordability Report examines why some countries have succeeded in making Internet access more affordable, accessible and universal, and what others can do to catch up. All stakeholders should now step up efforts to support these approaches and help ensure that more people can access the Internet and the social and economic benefits it offers.

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