Beyond WSIS: A stocktaking update

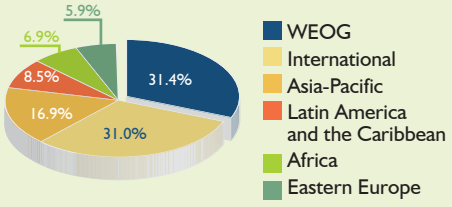
The WSIS Stocktaking Database now contains more than 3000 initiatives and projects from around the world that aim to bridge the digital divide. The database was launched in October 2004. A year later in November 2005, world leaders at the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis recognized the database as a valuable tool for monitoring progress and exchanging experience and best practice in providing access to information and communication technologies (ICT).

More than half of the 3000 activities listed in the database are by governments, with a further quarter by international and regional organizations. The rest are mainly undertaken by civil society (10 per cent) and business entities (5 per cent). Nearly one-third of the activities are international in nature. Western Europe and other groups (WEOG) accounts for the largest regional grouping, followed by the Asia-Pacific region (see charts below). Just over half of the projects submitted are multi-stakeholder partnerships, with civil society having the highest percentage of these, at over 80 per cent of projects.

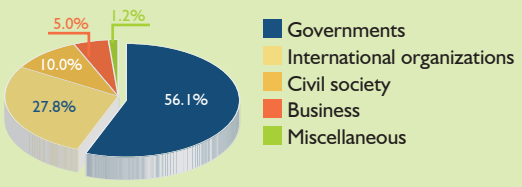
Here we give a small sample of the wide spectrum of initiatives in the *WSIS Stocktaking Database*, in order to highlight the progress being made around the world. The full range of information is presented through the Stocktaking Portal www.itu.int/wsis/stocktaking. It includes links to all original sources, as well as other sources of information.

Activities in the WSIS Stocktaking Database, by region and organization

Breakdown by region



Breakdown by organization submitting the activities



Note — *WEOG includes Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. United Nations regional groupings have been used in the analysis.*

Source: WSIS Stocktaking Database, www.itu.int/wsis/stocktaking.

Raising computer ownership

A number of projects are under way to increase ownership of personal computers, or PCs, which remain unaffordable in many parts of the world. For example, a computer can cost the equivalent of up to eight years' income for an average person in Bangladesh, but less than a month's wages for the average American. The following are some examples of these projects:

Egypt has a similar project called *A PC for Every Home*, which is part of the ITU-led *Connect the World* initiative. The idea behind the project is to enable Egyptian families to own a PC at an affordable price, mainly by offering simple and approved credit schemes to help purchase equipment (see *ITU News* of March 2006). Egypt aims to provide nationwide connectivity via an integrated telecommunication backbone.

Mexico is pressing ahead with the *Free Digital Community Access Centres for Marginalized Populations Programme* launched by the Secretariat of External Relations and other partners. Some 7500 centres have been established, each equipped with between 5 and 20 computers and connected to a local network, almost all of them using broadband via satellite.

Algeria announced its *OUSRATIC* programme ("One PC Per Home") in July 2005 as part of the government's strategy to equip 5 million households with an internet connection by 2010. Asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) technology will be used where possible. Working with a number of public and private partners, including service providers and banks, the Ministry of Posts and ICT created a scheme of low-interest, long-term loans to encourage people to obtain PCs and internet connection.

In the **Republic of Korea,** the Ministry of Information and Communication has launched the *Used PC Distribution* project in collaboration with the Korea Agency for Digital Opportunity and Promotion (KADO) and other business partners. They gather used PCs from companies and repair and distribute them mainly among disabled and low-income people in developing countries. Over 5000 PCs have been provided to 197 countries, including **Cambodia, Viet Nam, Timor-Leste** and **Kazakhstan**. KADO plans to distribute 25 000 more PCs during 2006.

Connecting villages

China's *Cun Cun Tong* ("village-to-village") project, begun in 2004, aims to promote universal access to 70 000 communities by 2010, and already by the end of 2005, more than 50 000 villages had been connected. In 31 Chinese provinces, public-private partnerships have been set up with telecommunication operators to fully self-finance coverage.

Ethiopia plans to connect about 15 000 villages by 2015. To this end, the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation has established

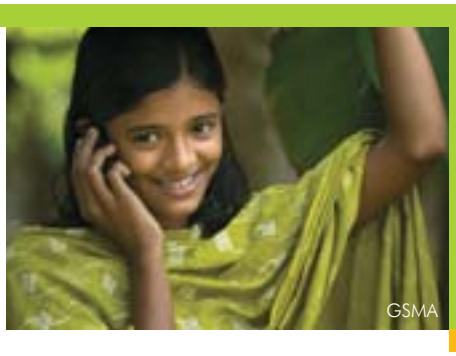
The Rural Connectivity Project. It is expected to help reduce from 50 km to below 10 km the average distance people in rural areas need to travel to reach a phone.

In **India**, there is a huge gap between digital hubs, such as Bangalore, and the rural areas that cover most of the country. The *Digital Empowerment Foundation* aims to connect villages to the internet by creating a nationwide, online platform to collect and disseminate grassroots information. Also, an e-commerce platform will be set up to promote trading opportunities in rural areas.

Indonesia has developed the *DESA berDERING 2010* programme to provide telephone access to all the country's villages by 2010, through joint efforts by the government and national telecommunication operators. Of Indonesia's 72 000 villages, about 43 000 still lack telephone access.

Jordan's *e-Village* project aims to raise awareness of opportunities for women's participation in the labour market. It is implemented in line with the strategic objectives of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Jordan has affordable ICT services, but opportunities for women are low compared to those for men. The project addresses this gap.

Nigeria has introduced the *Lagos Digital Village*, an ICT training and opportunity centre for young people. The project is a multi-stakeholder partnership between Junior Achievement of Nigeria, Microsoft and the Lagos State Government, and it is helped by volunteer tutors.


GSMA

Improving infrastructure

An ambitious project to interconnect three internet exchange points (IXP) in **Kenya, Uganda** and **Tanzania**, aims to increase and rationalize the volume of intra-regional traffic. A multi-stakeholder task force has been established, comprising representatives from regulators, internet service providers (ISP) and public telecommunication operators from the three East African countries.

Australia has introduced a National Communications Fund, which aims to support the roll-out of infrastructure and applications for high-speed telecommunication networks to deliver education and health services to the country's most remote parts.

Pakistan has seen Wateen Telecom announce plans to roll out a Wi-MAX network on a huge scale. The network is part of the "Broadband Pakistan" project to link 22 cities through broadband internet, voice, data and value-added services.

Brazil's Rio de Janeiro State Government has established a *Digital Inclusion Programme* that aims to reduce social inequality by disseminating internet and other ICT, and by equipping community centres with broadband, especially among disadvantaged communities.

Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and **Venezuela** should see their broadband connectiv-

ity increase through a programme called *Fostering Broadband Internet Access in the Andean Countries*. Led by ITU, the programme also involves the Association of the Telecommunication Companies of the Andean Community (ASETA).

Kuwait has designed a large-scale project led by the Ministry of Communication. The *Basra-Kuwait Connection Project* has the goal of providing greater bandwidth for countries in the Arab region.

Eastern European countries still lag behind countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in infrastructure capacity, and initiatives have been launched to close the gap. **Lithuania's** Government, for example, is implementing a *Broadband Infrastructure Development Strategy 2005–2010* to promote the use of broadband networks by public administration, private companies and individuals. In particular, the strategy seeks to promote broadband networks in non-competitive (mainly rural) areas, through public and private investment. The long-term goal is to connect all public administration to the broadband network by 2009.

Asia's least developed countries are looking to improve their infrastructure to make it robust and reliable. The *Broadband Satellite Gateway* of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications of **Myanmar** is based on a broadband satellite system that has multiple applications, from distance-learning and telemedicine to job recruitment interviews. The project is being undertaken with industry and civil society partners.

The *Community Wireless Connectivity* project in **Africa** aims to develop capacity based on wireless technologies. It was developed by the Association for Progressive Communication, and as well as providing wireless technologies, it teaches local communities to build the equipment themselves. During workshops delivered in the field in the local language, people learn how to design and build a wireless access point and how to maintain it. Training in basic ICT skills is also provided, with computer equipment for local wireless telecentres.

Many countries in **Africa**, **Asia** and **Latin America** are opting for satellite systems using very small aperture terminals (VSAT), which cost less and are easier to set up than alternative technologies. In Africa in particular, VSAT solutions promise to generate benefits for many people and partnership efforts have been established. For example, **Namibia's** *Infrastructure Expansion and Modernization of Telecommunications Infrastructure Programme* aims to create a 100-percent digital backbone. So far, it has connected all major towns through a 6000-km fibre optic network. And its VSAT solution will provide access to remote areas. ■

Photographs in this article are from the World Bank unless otherwise indicated.