



WSIS THEMATIC MEETING
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS FOR BRIDGING THE
DIGITAL DIVIDE
23-24 June 2005, Seoul, Republic of Korea

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Chairman's Report

1. At the invitation of ITU Secretary-General, Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, and the Minister of Information and Communications (MIC) of the Republic of Korea, Dr Dae-je Chin, and with the close co-operation of the Korea Agency for Digital Opportunity (KADO), a WSIS Thematic Meeting on Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Bridging the Digital Divide was held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, from 23-24 June 2005. The purpose of the meeting was two-fold: to provide a showcase for successful multi-stakeholder partnerships from around the world and to develop a methodology for monitoring the digital divide through a composite "digital opportunity index". The results of the meeting will be reported to the third PrepCom of the Tunis Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), to be held in September 2005 in Geneva.¹

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

2. Some 125 participants from 36 countries participated in the meeting. The participants were welcomed by Mr. Hun-Hyong Rho, Vice-Minister of Information and Communication, Republic of Korea and Dr Tim Kelly, Head of the Strategy and Policy Unit, ITU. They explained the background to the meeting in the context of the overall WSIS preparation process for the Tunis Phase and of the "Digital Bridges Initiative", which is jointly-run by ITU, MIC and KADO. In particular, this meeting is part of the planned implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action, which is one of the three areas of focus of the Tunis Phase. In the Plan of Action, each country is urged to have at least one multi-stakeholder partnership or public/private partnership to announce at the Tunis Phase, as a basis for future action.

3. In the opening ceremony, opening remarks were presented by Mr. Yeon-gi Son, President/CEO of KADO, the host of the meeting; Mr. Hak-su Kim, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), which had hosted the Asian regional meeting in Teheran, 31 May – 2 June 2005; and Mr. Othman Jerandi, Ambassador of Tunisia to the Republic of Korea, the host country of the Tunis Phase of the Summit. This meeting is an opportunity to enhance cooperation and mutual understanding between multiple actors working on bridging the digital divide. Among the new initiatives announced at the meeting was the establishment of an ICT Training Centre for the Asia-Pacific region in the Republic of Korea with initial funding of over US\$10m for the first five years. It was also stressed that the second phase of WSIS should be a "Summit of Solutions".

4. The meeting approved the nomination of Dr Michael Reed, Director of the International Institute for Software Technology, United Nations University, Macao, to chair the meeting and adopted the draft agenda. The keynote speakers provided the relevant background to the understanding of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

- Mr. Walter Fust, DG of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and Chair of the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), provided some definitions for multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) and outlined the lessons learned by the GKP since its creation in 1997;
- Mr. Jonathan Kushner (Microsoft) explained his company's "Unlimited Potential" programme, including work they are doing in producing low-cost, local language operating systems (Windows Starter Edition) for developing country markets;
- Mr. Andy Carvin (Digital Divide Network) expounded on the theme of trust between partners as an essential element in successful MSPs. Trust is based on a willingness to listen and learn

¹ All of the materials from the event are available on the website at: www.itu.int/wsisbridges

from each other, but also from honesty in each stakeholder explaining their expectations from the partnership.

- Mr. Art Reilly (Cisco) described some of the MSPs in which his company is involved, which focus on capacity-building. Cisco is partnering with ITU, amongst other partners, in the establishment of ICT training academies;
- Mr. Alain Clerc (Digital Solidarity Fund) explained the objectives and funding of the voluntary Global Fund for Digital Solidarity, which had been launched on March 14 2005 as an innovative way of raising funds for ICT4D. The Funds membership board is divided equally between governments, private sector and civil society.
- Mr. Yon Moreira da Silva (Brasil Telecom) outlined the Brazilian 'Internet for All' programme, which is based on a partnership of different organizations seeking to extend Internet access through a variety of measures, including targeted discount tariffs and tax exemptions to encourage Internet take-up.
- Mr. Bechir Raddaoui (Tunisia) explained some of his country's measures aimed at extending the use of ICTs, including measures focused on rural areas. The government has committed to eliminating fixed and mobile subscription charges for rural users by the year 2009. The parallel events during the Tunis Summit should show the multi-stakeholder nature of the implementation process.

5. The background document entitled "Multi-stakeholder partnerships for bridging the digital divide" (BDB-WSIS/05) was presented by Dr Lilia Perez-Chavolla and Dr Tim Kelly (ITU). The paper, which was structured around the agenda of the meeting, provides a number of examples of MSPs in action, as well as providing some thoughts on how to finance them and how to overcome barriers.

6. In the session on National Policies for building successful multi-stakeholder projects, presentations were given on national programmes in Brazil, Mexico and Viet Nam, together with presentations on the National Information Society in the Philippines, the WSIS Youth Caucus and from Thailand on a software tool namely "SEE : Service E-Readiness Explorer" for measuring the effectiveness of e-Government websites. The tool could be developed further by an MSP approach under multi-government cooperation to accomplish a standardized gauge for all.

7. In the session on promoting access through telecentres and capacity-building, presentations were made on the use of ICTs in nation-building in Afghanistan, i-Centres in Bulgaria and youth training in Burundi. The state of the ICT Sector in Nepal was presented together with the work of the United Nations IT University Volunteers (UNITEs) and a series of development initiatives sponsored by KADO, Republic of Korea.

8. In the session on ICT applications, presentations focused on ICT applications in India, providing price information for farmers via ICTs as part of the e-Sri Lanka programme in Sri Lanka, the "One school, one computer laboratory programme" in Indonesia, ICTs for people with disabilities in Pakistan, and the "Digitall Hope" projects supported by Samsung of the Korean Republic.

SUCCESSFUL MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS

9. What are the attributes of successful Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships? They are various, but include:

- A true partnership between stakeholders with equal rights and obligations, built on trust among partners;
- A willingness to share the risks and benefits of MSPs;
- Complementarity and diversity of competence among partners, and a diversity of cultures, so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts;
- Sustainability, scalability and replicability. Generally speaking, the effectiveness of MSPs increases as they mature and transition from pilot projects to ongoing programmes. Those that have the biggest impact are those where a particular model can be copied or transferred between countries, such as the GrameenPhone Village Phone initiatives, which now reaches around 40'000 villages in rural Bangladesh and has been copied in Uganda.

10. A common element in many MSPs is the provision of community-based access to ICTs. This is seen as a way of plugging the gap until ICTs are widely available and affordable on a household or individual basis. National implementations of community access for ICTs vary. They include, for instance, multi-purpose telecentres in Viet Nam, Digital Community Centres in Mexico, telekiosks in Afghanistan, i-Centres in Bulgaria, telecottages in Hungary, etc. A report on the diversity and sustainability of community-based access around the world is being prepared for the Tunis Phase of WSIS by IDRC of Canada and the Digital Divide Network. Although the diversity and local adaptation of these programmes is part of their strength, it would be useful to develop a set of common features of successful community-based ICT access centres, to aid their replicability.

11. What are the main barriers that MSPs face? All speakers reported that integration of different partners was a major challenge. In part, this is a difficulty in reconciling the different cultures of the different stakeholders. But even within the same category of stakeholder, among government departments for instance, there is often a difficulty in getting different departments to work together, and to share information. A further barrier is in obtaining finance, particularly for moving from the pilot to the programme phase. However, new sources of financing are emerging, such as the Digital Solidarity Fund, or the creation of national universal service funds, which now exist in 39 countries and are planned in a further 31.

12. One promising development is Free, Low-cost and Open Source Software (FLOSS) which is being used in several of the MSPs presented, notably in the Internet for All programme in Brazil, the MIT US\$100 laptop programme and the UNU-INST Open Source Initiative. FLOSS offers a number of advantages including:

- Cost-saving, particularly for organizations such as government departments, or franchised telecentres that would otherwise have to purchase multiple software licences from proprietary service providers;
- FLOSS approaches are generally more adaptable to local needs and languages;
- FLOSS offers self-determination for MSPs;
- For MSP personnel, especially software developers, FLOSS offers immediate entry into the global development community, which is proven to be supportive for newcomers and those lacking resources.

Nevertheless, it is recognized that FLOSS is not necessarily the best option for all MSP, and the principle of free choice between proprietary and open-source software is important to maintain.

Measuring and monitoring the digital divide

13. The second area of focus of the conference was on measuring and monitoring the digital divide. The background document entitled "Measuring digital opportunity" (BDB-WSIS/06) was presented by Mr Michael Minges (TMG). In the first phase of WSIS, in 2003, the need was identified for the creation of a composite "digital opportunity index" DOI (WSIS Plan of Action Para 28a). This index would provide a statistical tool for international evaluation and benchmarking of the objectives, goals, and targets of WSIS action plans.

14. To address the above need, a "Partnership for the measurement of ICTs for Development", comprising more than ten international organisations and national statistical agencies was formed to work on defining a set of comparable indicators for measuring the information society. As a first step, a list of core ICT indicators has now been formulated. The presentation by Mr Minges outlined how these core ICT indicators can be mapped to create a DOI. The novel approach in this DOI is that it relies totally on a set of internationally-agreed indicators. Most existing ICT indices are based on a set of indicators identified by the creator of the given index. At this stage, the DOI presented here can be defined as an index for measuring the ICT infrastructure capacity of countries.

15. In the session on measuring the digital divide, presentations were made on choosing the most appropriate use of data in developing the DOI (e.g., household vs. individual access, quantity vs. quality of internet access), identifying a measure of inequality between the ICT infrastructure of nations based

on the Lorenz curve, which is a statistical tool commonly used to measure economic inequality, and a historical review of ICT measurement over the past decade with an analysis of the experience of the US National Science Foundation in promoting the ICT infrastructure in the United States.

16. Among the conclusions in this session were that any reasonable measure of ICT infrastructure should include mobile devices, and that number of Internet hosts was an unreliable measure. It was argued that good measurements were essential to guide policy and to identify opportunities in the developing world. The NSF example showed how policy could be driven by measurements, and that desired results could be obtained with modest funding and through multi-stakeholder partnerships in contrast to top-down direction by governments. It was proposed that the NSF example would provide a useful model for connecting unconnected villages in developing countries. It was agreed that measurements showed that the digital divide is shrinking but at a slow rate and that urgent policy action is needed. Finally the ambitious suggestion was made that the international community pick a pilot nation in the developing world and build a quality ICT infrastructure in that nation to establish a template for global use.

17. In the session on proposing the next steps to bridge the digital divide, a detailed scan-target-focus strategy for multi-stakeholder partnerships was described in which current status is determined, opportunities for progress are identified, and plans for solutions are made and implemented. Progress was announced on a coordinated international strategy for internet governance prepared by the UN Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) to be submitted to WSIS in 2005; an analysis of the UN ICT Task Force (UNICTTF) was given, in which the strengths and weaknesses of its operation were outlined, and the importance of Civil Society Organisations in relation to WGIG and other issues relevant to WSIS was asserted.

18. Again in this session it was repeatedly noted that successful efforts to bridge the digital divide depended on partnerships between governments, the private sector, and the civil society. The report on (WGIG) included the affirmation that any developments toward administration of the internet must be transparent, democratic, and multilateral. The analysis of UNICTTF discussed the possibility of creating a Global Alliance for ICT Development to follow up on the work of the current task force. It was suggested that this new organisation not be under the UN to provide more flexibility in its administration, and it was stressed that it should not create a new bureaucracy nor should it have operational powers. It was also pointed out that not having representation from academia was one weakness of UNICTTF. Finally, it was concluded that it was important to bring the diversity of the civil society into decisions on internet governance and ICT development, and that consensus on such issues was not always possible. It was asserted that the primary need was a strategy to accommodate differences.

19. The final session was a discussion of the Chairman's report. The session ended with an expression of gratitude to MIC, ITU, and KADO for the organisation of a successful and enjoyable meeting.