

# WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

---

## ROUND TABLE ON CAPACITY BUILDING

Geneva, Wednesday 19 February, 2003

Suggestions with regard to the guidelines proposed by the Executive Secretary of WSIS to maintain discussions within a flexible and coherent framework

Marcel A. Boisard

UN Assistant Secretary-General

Executive Director, UNITAR

# I. Guiding principle: approach to capacity building

---

- The generic expression ‘capacity-building’ has become a catchphrase in recent years. As with many terms born of the politics of development assistance, it evokes a rather vague concept which can have many potential meanings.
- The term brings to mind associated actions such as training. More recently, it has come to denote the need for a new approach to development cooperation.

- 
- This new approach is centered on the concept of strengthening national human and institutional capacity, rather than that of direct technical assistance.
  - Capacity-building thus represents no more or less than the development of the ability to decide and implement or, in more modern terminology, to manage.

## II. Challenges to and Potentialities for action with special reference to ICTs

---

- The main difficulty and often source of discouragement arises from the divergence between institutional inertia and the demands of an ever-accelerating society adapting itself to the globalization of issues. Good training can progressively counter the reluctance to change.

- 
- Education ensures continuity of values and transmission of knowledge, while training lays the groundwork for innovation and the improvement of institutions through enhanced individual skills.
  - The interrelationship between education, training and capacity-building is complex. A sound basic education lays a good foundation for the assimilation of new skills. Training policies should encourage flexibility and imagination.

- 
- The practical solutions which had been successful in a less complex and more stable world must often be revisited.
  - The market of skills strengthening, transfer of techniques and management improvement is highly competitive and often costly. Funding is difficult to secure, since the concrete results of training civil servants, particularly in developing countries, are not easily measured and do not lead to the production of tradable wealth.

- 
- Deep reflection on the issue is needed. There is a real danger of losing sight of existing capacities in developing countries and countries in transition.
  - Foreign-driven capacity operations, implemented by expatriates, can strengthen or undermine civil society. The relevance and vigour of existing institutions must be evaluated and recognized in a case by case fashion.

# III. Suggestions for Action

---

- Institution-building must acknowledge the existing capacities and look for the broadest possible involvement of stakeholders, in recipient countries.
- Strategic planning for assessing priorities and capacity-building lies primarily with the national authorities which are best placed to evaluate their own needs and identify relevant plans of action.



- 
- Through exchange and partnership, countries can identify their own methods, taking inspiration from the best practices of others. However, imagination and flexibility are best enhanced when a strict intellectual framework is adopted.
  - Training and specific models of apprenticeship in specialized fields are becoming increasingly important. Indeed, competencies are often more sought after than qualifications.

- 
- Thought must be given to both the content and the methodology. It should first be ensured that professionals in developing countries will have access to the material and whether or not they will have the necessary time to follow the training programmes. Official validation, by means of tests or exams, must be put in place.

- 
- As such, ICT technologies are not a cure-all and can never fully replace the individual exchange between trainee and trainer. However, they present new possibilities for training techniques and thus reinforce the obligation to strive towards imaginative approaches