



National ICTD strategies: Roadmaps to the information society

THE PROPOSITION

The emergence of the Information Society offers unprecedented opportunities to achieve human development goals of personal and collective empowerment. For most developing countries, however, this will not be an automatic process. UNDP encourages countries to develop ICT for development strategies because they constitute the policy paths towards the Information Society. UNDP's approach was developed as part of its work on the Digital Opportunities Initiative (DOI) Report (2001). It emphasizes the need to establish direct links with broader development plans and targets, such as Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Working on an all-inclusive approach, it recommends complementing upstream policy and implementation approaches with downstream programmes to avoid a top-down focus that reach the poor and marginalized. Strategy implementation should not be the exclusive concern of governments, but should also involve civil society and the private sector. Above all, these strategies must incorporate reasonable short- and long-term implementation time frames, indicate a hierarchy of implementation priorities and have realistic costing.

THE CONTEXT

Although strategies for developing a local ICT sector date back to the 1980s (Singapore, India, Brazil), a development focus only emerged in the late 1990s. The turn of the Millennium (and the Y2K challenge) brought forward additional support to this shift in focus. Under the auspices of new global public-private partnerships, such as the G-8 Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force), and the UN ICT Task Force, countries shifted radically from random pilots, to more comprehensive policy approaches with national ICTD strategies as the cornerstones. The goals set in this context ranged from identifying applications for ICT in development, to the development of wholly new domestic ICT industries. The last three years have witnessed substantial growth in the development of ICTD strategies. In Africa alone in 2003, more than 35 countries have completed, or are in the process of completing related efforts.

Although more than 90 developing countries have already embarked on the design of national ICTD strategies, the results have been far from optimal. There is an urgent need to streamline approaches. Many of the strategies have a technological focus and aim at promoting the development of a local ICT industry (mostly software). Others are over-ambitious and lack the credibility to attract the required financial resources for implementation. Yet others do not identify concrete priorities and/or adequate implementations plans and are, for the most part, government driven — excluding all other sectors from the process. Moreover, most of them are not linked with national development agendas, such as poverty reduction and the MDGs.

THE EVIDENCE

In partnership with the private and non-profit sectors, UNDP has pioneered a non-prescriptive comprehensive policy framework for the design and implementation of national ICTD strategies (read more in the [Digital Opportunity Initiative report](#)). This DOI methodology has been widely praised and adopted. [UNDP has also assisted close to 30 countries in the finalization and implementation of strategies](#) and has received over 50 requests for assistance from programme countries. [UNDP's assistance to the government of Mozambique in the design of its ICT Policy Implementation Strategy](#) has become a prototype that other countries are replicating and has been captured in the [UNDP Practice Implementation Toolkit](#). OECD has published a series of reports assessing the links between ICT strategies and PRSPs and development agendas (www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/54/2499909.doc, www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/53/2499940.doc, and www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/52/2499971.doc). [UNECA](#) has produced several reports of related activities in Africa. In the 2nd semester of 2003, UNDP supported three regional workshops in [Mozambique](#), [Malaysia](#) and [Azerbaijan](#).

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