



Asian Forum on Information and Communication Technology Policies and e-Strategies

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Welcome Remarks

by



Stephen Browne
Director for Development, UNDP
Chair of e-Strategies Working Group of the
UN ICT Task Force



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Minister Moggie,

Ministers of the Asia-Pacific region,

Distinguished participants, colleagues and friends,

Let me add my own words of welcome to this Asia Forum. My special thanks to Shahid Akhtar and his team at APDIP for their splendid work in organizing this meeting, to the host Government for their support and to the Government of Japan for their financial assistance.

I should perhaps begin with a few words about the UN ICT Task Force, under the auspices of which we are convening this meeting. 'Task Force' is a modest name for quite an ambitious venture. It is itself a forum with an almost unique composition. It brings together high-level representatives from Governments, Private Sector, Civil Society and International Organisations. Established in 2001, the Task Force is where the ICT and the development communities interact in their quest to mobilize worldwide support for the objective of attaining the Millennium Development Goals with the use of ICT.

The Task Force established a series of Working Groups, each chaired by a different organization from the public, civil or private sectors. Working Group 2, which is chaired by UNDP, is on national and regional e-strategies. At our meeting in Geneva last February, we decided to organize a series of regional meetings to examine the processes by which e-strategies were developed, compare content and implementation plans, and help identify the opportunities for partnership. The first of these regional meetings was held in Maputo, Mozambique at the beginning of September. And following this KL Meeting, there will be a third regional meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan next month (November) for the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

These meetings are timed so as to provide some input to the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva this December. It is hoped that this meeting will agree to a

Declaration on Policies and Strategies, which can be forwarded to the Summit by the countries attending this meeting.

UNDP has been active in helping a growing number of countries to develop and implement ICT for Development strategies and policies, indeed it has become one of UNDP's main priorities within our work on ICT for Development. It has been a learning process for all concerned, not least ourselves, and I thought I would provide you with a few reflections of my own, based on some of the experience we have accumulated.

What is a strategy and why a strategy?

The term e-strategy is a generic one and is understood by different people to mean different things. The understanding has evolved over time. The first generation of "e-strategies" from the early 1980s were those limited computer automation programmes. A later generation consisted of Y2K plans in the late 1990s, designed to avoid major systemic breakdowns as the Millennium turned. The latest generation ranges from limited automation plans to major strategic road maps intended to put countries on the paths to a full-fledged information society.

To know what a strategy could or should be, we need to ask why – today – e-strategies are needed at all. There are several responses.

The whole world is now caught up in a major technological revolution, of which there have been few in modern history. Unlike the earlier revolutions, this knowledge revolution has the potential to impact on the lives of people everywhere at the same time.

- E-strategies can help to illuminate how countries can take the best advantage of this tidal wave of change: the technologies to adopt or adapt; the best means of deploying them; the challenge of universality.
- E-strategies also need to go beyond technologies and set national goals and standards for information openness. With the information revolution, countries can become more open, but how open do they want to be? These are not technical issues. They are fundamental to the nature of societies and to the observance of individual rights and ideals. There are large responsibilities for Governments, involving critical decisions on policy.

What are the ingredients of a good strategy?

An attempt to provide guidance on the contents of an e-strategy was made two years ago when - under the Digital Opportunities Initiative - UNDP, in partnership with the Markle Foundation and Accenture produced the report called "Creating a Development Dynamic". That report identified 5 intersecting areas of concern to be addressed by national e-strategies:

- human capacity
- content
- infrastructure
- enterprise
- policy.

And there is a sixth component - "strategic compacts" - because of the importance of partnerships and inclusion in the development and implementation of strategies.

The report was not intended as a prescription, but these are the different facets which are suggested by experience. We have found in UNDP that about one third of the more than 60 countries which we have supported in the development of their e-strategies have explicitly adopted this six-component approach. It is appropriate, too, that the discussions at this meeting are organised around some of these major themes.

The challenges

I want to end with a list of 8 challenges which have been suggested by the experience of the last few years:

1. Vision. There is the need for an overarching vision emanating from the country's top leadership to help bind the elements of an e-strategy and establish its long-term objectives.
2. Consistency. ICT for Development strategies need to be consistent with the goals and scope of parallel national development strategies and/or poverty reduction strategies. They cannot be seen as inconvenient add-ons to other priorities. Ultimately, these strategies should become part of a country's overall development plan.
3. Government coordination. It is important to build an effective inter-Ministerial coordinating mechanism to guide the development and implementation processes.
4. Consultation. Thorough consultation processes are needed in the development of an ICT-D strategy in order to build comprehension and consensus in the private sector and civil society about the objectives and paths of implementation.
5. Implementation. A strategy needs a clearly articulated plan of action in which the sources of financial and other resources are identified, the key implementing actors known, and a realistic timetable drawn up.
6. Resources. An ICT-D strategy should be compatible with available resources and contain clear priorities. Obviously, no country can know precisely the amount of resources it can

count on. However, some domestic resources need to be earmarked for some of the highest priority steps in the implementation.

7. Policy framework. An ICT-D strategy needs a well-articulated policy framework to facilitate the implementation steps towards an information society. Some of these priorities are far-reaching and may be controversial:

- How can ICT use - especially telecoms - remain lucrative for Governments while allowing for continuing technology innovation coming mainly from the private sector?
- How can the benefits of ICTs be spread widely and universal access be guaranteed?
- Should censorship accompany Internet use?
- How can communications openness be balanced by privacy?
- How can the security of the state and of individuals be safeguarded. \?
- How will countries resolve the growing debate on proprietary versus open-source software?
- And so on...

8. Objectives. Strategies and policies are designed to produce results. What are these results and how should they be monitored? Following the largest gathering of world leaders ever in September 2000, we now have the Millennium Declaration. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which resulted from this Declaration have become the most widely acknowledged benchmarks of development progress. Strategies and policies need to maintain a focus on MDGs and other development results. Mechanisms are needed to measure progress.

Many of these issues will be the subject of debate and discussion over the next three days of this Forum. We shall obviously not resolve them here in any definitive manner, but let us hope that when we leave this Forum, having heard a wide range of experiences, we shall have a clearer idea of the information road ahead.

Thank You