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INTEGRATING ICT IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

The attached note provides a summary of the Joint OECD/UN/World Bank Global Forum on the Knowledge Economy on the above mentioned theme, held on 4-5 March 2003.

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Integrating ICT in Development Programmes

This forum, held at the OECD Paris on 4-5 March 2003, formed part of OECD's response to the work of the UN ICT Task Force and G8 DOT Force. It provided a platform for discussion leading up to the World Summit on the Information Society. It aimed to: integrate ICTs in donor programmes in support of countries' own development plans; address the policy challenges and opportunities of ICT for development; highlight best practices for ICT as a tool for development; and clarify stakeholders' roles. The forum brought together some 200 representatives of governments, civil society and the private sector—from both OECD and developing countries—and of international and regional organisations.

1. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) can serve as valuable vehicle for combating poverty, fostering economic growth, and meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The challenge is to integrate ICTs fully into national development plans and donor assistance programmes.
2. Success requires **action at three levels**—integrating ICTs into: 1) topical development solutions in sectors; 2) development programmes; 3) broader understanding of development. Some progress has been made on the first level, but effort at the second and third levels is still weak and uneven.
3. Few countries have thus far **integrated ICTs** into their national development plans or Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). These strategies should act as the focal point for developing countries and donors to design their ICT interventions and assistance, so as to maximise the poverty-reducing impact of ICTs.
4. Local actors, local initiatives, and local content should be emphasised in ICT for development initiatives. The **local private sector** has a major role in promoting effective use of ICTs and in strengthening local production capacity and creating jobs. Donors should try to anchor ICT projects at the local level and harness local capacity, including the private sector and non-governmental organisations. In all these efforts, special attention should be paid to using ICTs to address the gender dimension of poverty.
5. Public-private partnerships play a key role in harnessing ICT for development, given the scale of the resources required. ICTs can have a catalytic role in fostering growth in a variety of sectors of the economy. Encouraging growth in the ICT sector and ICT-led growth in other sectors requires a proper **enabling environment**, balancing risk and regulation, and new forms of partnership.
6. Fostering private sector-led provision of ICT infrastructure and access requires a **proactive role of governments and donors**. To extend the reach of ICTs to poor and rural populations they need to: create appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks; build human capacity to implement policies and programmes; and develop innovative and flexible forms of public financing to leverage private investment.

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7. ICTs can increase the capacity of governments to deal with economic and social challenges. **E-Government** is an especially promising area of ICT application for developing countries. It permits more efficient and transparent administration at lower cost, fosters broader public participation, and helps give the poor improved access to government services and a greater say in public decisions.

8. New forms of **multi-sectoral partnership**—linking governments, the private sector, NGOs and international organisations in informal, results-based co-operation—can bring flexibility and creativity to the ICT for development effort. But they require clarity about objectives and outcomes and their relationship to formal initiatives and institutions.

9. Donors and developing countries must do more to share information and co-ordinate efforts, with a particular focus on evaluation, and learning from both successes and failures. Donors need to focus on **competing for impact, not for volume**. Best practice examples need to focus not simply on which projects have succeeded, but on critical success factors, including demand, cost, capacity and content. It is time to move beyond experimentation to a more rigorous, co-ordinated, results-oriented approach to ICTs that will make them a more effective tool for sustained growth and poverty reduction.

*To encourage information sharing and co-ordination the OECD produced a **matrix** of ICT Strategies and Programmes of 22 bilateral and 25 multilateral donors.
See <http://www.oecd.org/dac/ict>.*

10. The **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)**—in Geneva in December 2003 and Tunis in November 2005—can make an important contribution to advance the effort to mainstream ICT in development programmes. It can reinforce the role of ICTs as a strategic cross-cutting theme in sectoral programmes (health, education, etc.) and as a central component in national poverty reduction strategies. It can make clear to Heads of Government the contribution that ICTs can make to achieving the MDGs.

11. In the lead-up to the WSIS, **OECD** can provide vital input in several areas. OECD can advance international efforts to harness ICT for development, and in fostering the co-operation and co-ordination that are vital to those efforts. It can facilitate debate of mainstreaming ICT for development issues and strategies within the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), providing policy leadership, awareness raising and benchmarking. It can also: 1) contribute a deeper analysis of the role and value of ICTs in economic and social development; 2) develop effective frameworks for ICT statistical indicators and benchmarks; and 3) work toward universalising international ground rules for information security, privacy and trust.

12. The WSIS needs to have a strong "**pro-poor**" agenda. Proposals and commitments that emerge from the WSIS must be backed up by concrete and realistic financial commitments that draw on four complementary sets of resources: local resources; bilateral donors; multilateral donors; and private investment. All must accept a responsibility to make realistic commitments and deliver on them. More attention should be paid to maximising synergies among existing resources and using aid strategically as a catalyst for private investment.

For more information, the full report, agenda, presentations, list of participants, and links to other sites, visit the Forum Website: www.oecd.org/dac/ict. The forum was jointly organised by the OECD Directorates for Development Co-operation and Science, Technology and Industry, in collaboration with the OECD Centre for Co-operation with Non-Members, UN agencies and the World Bank.