



STRATEGIC PLAN

United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force

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I. Background

The UN ICT TF Mandate

The United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (UN ICT TF) was formed by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in response to the request of the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2000 of the Economic and Social Council as per Council resolution 2000/29.

On the basis of consultations with a representative group of stakeholders, the Secretary General submitted his report (E/2001/7) to the Council, addressing key issues regarding the formation of a UN ICT Task Force. The Secretary General's report was approved by the Council on 13 March 2001. It therefore effectively constitutes the official mandate of the ICT TF. It outlines the overall objectives, general strategic framework, modalities, composition and funding policy of the TF. Therefore, all work on the strategy and action plan of the TF must refer to the TF Mandate (E/2001/7) for guidance and overall strategic parameters. Where not explicitly stated otherwise, reference to the Task Force Mandate should be construed to refer to this document (E/2001/7).

The TF Mandate explicitly states that "The modalities of operation of the Task Force should be simple, efficient, transparent, and accountable."¹ Furthermore, in order to ensure relevancy and (implicitly) efficiency, "the initial duration of the Task Force's mandate should be three years." The TF membership should keep in mind that the significant challenges which it prepares to meet are set against a backdrop of serious deadlines. Demonstrated efficiency and effectiveness should be seen as both targets for the present and criteria for the future of the Task Force. Any TF strategy should take this into consideration.

United Nations ICT Task Force Plan of Action (PoA): the First Phase

Pursuant to its mandate, and on the basis of extensive consultations, the TF adopted, at its first meeting, a Plan of Action (PoA)² 'as a framework for guidance of its work'. The PoA outlined the short-term actions to be taken and the medium-term objectives to be pursued.

In the short term, the focus was placed on laying the groundwork, including through 'broad awareness-raising' programmes, establishing a website, building stakeholder networks and carrying out stakeholder campaigns, and creating a global inventory of ICT best practices. The medium-term objectives related to support for national e-strategies, universal participation in policy-making, increasing access and lowering costs, local content creation, human capacity development, health, HIV/AIDS, and fostering enterprise and entrepreneurship.

In the months following its launch, the Task Force has moved rapidly to create the foundations and mechanisms for carrying out its mandate and the PoA. Many of the short-term actions have been largely accomplished. Apart from the creation of an increasingly functional and informative website, stakeholder networks have been set up in all regions and a number of policy and awareness-raising initiatives have been taken.

¹ *ICT Task Force, Report of the Secretary General*, Section IV. Modalities, Paragraph 21.

² UNICTTF/2001/11

A major synergy-building and awareness-raising effort was undertaken in holding a special, high-level meeting of the General Assembly on 17 June 2002, where the Chairman of the Task Force and several of its members, along with the Chairman of the DOT Force, the Secretary-General of ITU and a large number of business and civil society leaders engaged in a broad-ranging dialogue on ICT-for-development issues with high-level public policy makers, including Secretary-General Kofi Annan, President Wade of Senegal (who represented NEPAD), the President of the General Assembly and Ministers, high officials and Ambassadors from all regions of the world.

More recently, at the Johannesburg Summit, the Task Force Chairman participated in the Summit-level Round Table and several virtual panels and press conferences were organized with the participation of several TF members, including those from Africa.

A number of partnership initiatives have also been undertaken, including a global inventory of some 900 ICT-for-development programmes and projects in partnership with the Development Gateway Foundation of the World Bank; the launching of a Digital Diaspora Network of African Entrepreneurs in North America and Europe in partnership with Digital Partners, UNFIP, UNIFEM and CERFE Institute of Italy (a similar network is planned for the Caribbean). The Digital Opportunity Initiative of UNDP and the Markle Foundation was launched to provide dedicated support for developing national e-strategies and their implementation. National e-strategy seminars have been held in Jordan and Mali and similar events are planned in other regions.

An ICT Policy-awareness and training programme for Ambassadors and Diplomats has been launched in New York in partnership with UNITAR. Similar programmes are being planned with the UN Staff College in Turin for UN system staff and with Digital Nations Foundation of MIT and Harvard for high officials and policy-makers in developing countries.

The Task Force has set up six Working Groups and five Regional Nodes to pursue its medium-term objectives. The Working Groups and Regional Nodes have attracted broad participation of major stakeholders, including from developing countries. They have developed their own action plans and several among them have forged strong synergy with the DOT Force Implementation Teams.

Under the leadership of the Task Force Chairman, the Bureau has undertaken a major effort to develop synergy and close cooperation with the G-8 DOT Force and its follow-up process, the Executive Secretariat of the preparatory process of WSIS, the WEF Digital Divide Task Force, the Development Gateway Foundation and InfoDev Programme of the World Bank, GDOI of UNDP and Markle Foundation, ITU, UNESCO, HealthInternet of WHO, UNITes of UNV, UN Staff College, UNITAR and UNCEB as well as with other global initiatives (ICANN, ICC, GKP, GBDe)

One salutary outcome of this synergic approach is the launching of the CEO Charter (by which CEOs commit 20 per cent of their philanthropic budgets to ICT-for-development programmes) at the WEF annual meeting in New York. It was given impetus at the General Assembly special meeting in June with involvement of the Task Force Chairman and several of its members.

The Second Phase: Future strategy and work programme

In the ‘Summary of Conclusions and Decisions’ adopted by the TF at its First Meeting³, it was stressed that “achieving synergies with other initiatives and programmes in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was necessary, as was focusing on a clearly defined set of priority tasks and objectives..... In this context, education, training and access were identified as pivotal and deserving attention by the TF Building an inventory of best practice and lessons learned should be a key component of the Plan. The importance of creative mainstreaming of ICT in development and poverty reduction programmes was underscored”.

The Task Force members have thus established, from the start, that a well-focused strategy linked to MDGs and human development, and mainstreaming ICT into development programmes are key ingredients of success.

As the TF prepares to enter its second year of work, there is need to move rapidly to build on this strategic approach towards the next phase of producing clear results, drawing the necessary lessons from the experience so far and with a clear-eyed view of the gaps that need to be filled, taking into account the current environment, the potentials of its stakeholders and partners, its comparative advantages and value added, as well as its limitations.

II. The Framework

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000 by all member states of the UN General Assembly meeting at the Heads of State/Government level. This Declaration sets out eight global development goals and respective targets, intended to address the global needs of humanity for educational, economic, social and political empowerment and dignity: in other words, seeking to radically reduce poverty on a global basis by addressing its root causes. The MDGs and the Millennium Declaration that forms their context share with the ICT TF a focus on multi-stakeholder partnerships, which reflect an emerging trend in global development efforts, and also reflect an awareness of the daunting scale and complexity of the challenges represented by the MDGs.

The MDGs differ from the objectives of the ICT TF in that they are objectives which are ends in and of themselves. The objectives of the ICT TF on the other hand are *means* to an end, not an end in their own right. Thus, “bridging the Digital Divide” should be pursued with a view to contributing to producing measurable results in meeting the MDGs, i.e. significant reduction in poverty and empowerment of socially, educationally, and economically marginalized people. Therefore the role of the ICT TF is to serve as a tool of the UN system and the global community at large in meeting the goals of the Millennium Declaration.

The ICT TF Mandate (E/2001/7) and its PoA (UNICT TF/2001/11) in stating the overall objectives of the TF refer specifically to the Millennium Summit of the UN held in September 2000 and to the “goal of reducing the proportion of people living in poverty by half by 2015.” The Mandate states specifically that, “Developing countries, in particular African countries and other least developed countries, should be the major focus of the effort.” Taking into account the direct relationship between the mandate of the Task Force and the MDGs, as well as Task Force actual contribution to the achievement of these goals, at the expiration of the original three-year mandate of the Task Force the Secretary-General of the United Nations will make a decision on whether to extend the mandate.

³ UNICT TF/2001/11

ICTs and Poverty

We live in the Information Age. The significance of advancements in information and communication technologies in increasing productivity and efficiency, promoting economic growth and competitiveness, and fostering new solutions and approaches to social and economic issues has been well recognized. Despite the bursting of the Dotcom Bubble and the unrealistic expectations that accompanied it, there is still a consensus that new ICT, in particular the Internet and related technologies, are having what may be an unprecedented impact on the economies of developed countries. Concerns have therefore been raised that the unequal dispersion of these new technologies between and within countries is creating a “Digital Divide” which may exacerbate and further entrench existing socio-economic inequalities. The motivation to address the “Digital Divide” is well placed. However, it is important that this effort remain focused on its context, which is the achievement of the MDGs.

New ICT like the Internet have an undeniable relevance and utility in meeting the needs of the poor. They are no panacea, but they *are* powerful tools in the development tool kit.

Poverty has complex and interrelated causes which work together to inhibit the ability of the poor to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty. For example, high basic illiteracy rates are a serious impediment to the direct use of computers and internet by the poor, even in the absence of local-content or connectivity problems. More traditional media (e.g. radio, television, telephones) may sometimes present effective alternatives for development interventions among the very poor. Thus, for example, one possible tactical goal in an ICT for development program might include encouraging the privatization and liberalization of media, which has been shown to increase responsiveness to the needs of the poor. ICT for development does not automatically mean Internet for development.

The point then is that a strategic approach to utilization of ICT in development should include and blend the full range of new and traditional ICT in a creative and flexible way. It should take an open-minded approach and select what works best to meet the MDG targets.

This is not meant to contradict the general objective that ICT be seen not as a separate component of development projects, but as an integral aspect of all development work. However it should set the context in which that effort is undertaken.

III. Guidelines, Principles and Objectives

The principles of operation of the TF should be accountability, openness, transparency and trust. Other principles include collaborative partnership, multi-stakeholder participation, efficiency, innovation, inclusiveness and visibility in the international arena. The decision to make the TF an advisory and not an operational body should be reaffirmed. The need to produce tangible results should be recognized.

The objectives of the TF as outlined in its mandate and POA should be reiterated. More specifically, the following objectives should provide the framework for the core strategy of the TF:

- (i) Act as a catalyst to foster the use of ICT to promote development and combat poverty ;
- (ii) Act as a strategy advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General on the use of ICT in advancing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);

- (iii) Advocate maintaining of ICT-for-development as high as possible on the development agenda of the UN system;
- (iv) Strengthen synergies and coordination among UN agencies;
- (v) Serve as a policy forum, a global think-tank and an information exchange point on ICT-for-development issues, help identify and promote creative ways of mainstreaming ICT in development programmes;
- (vi) Facilitate and support coordination and cooperation among the various stakeholders operating in the ICT-for-development community;
- (vii) Promote broad awareness of the potential of ICT for advancing development, facilitate sharing of experiences and lessons learned, support replicating and scaling up of best practices;
- (viii) Serve as a forum for building broad global partnerships among government, private sector and civil society institutions;
- (ix) Explore and facilitate innovative funding arrangements for key "ICT for development" initiatives.

IV. The Core Strategy

The task ahead is to build on the achievements of the first phase by defining a core strategy and aligning resources and actions for the second phase to its implementation. While the Task Force must continue and enhance its role and work as a policy and intellectual forum, and continue to build on its initiatives for awareness-raising, partnership-building and network creation at the global and regional levels, all these should be seen as components of an overall strategic approach designed to advance its core strategy that would produce clear and tangible results.

The Mandate and the POA specifically state that the TF is not to be an operational or executing organization. Its specific mandate is to use its character as a global body with established strengths of “legitimacy, universality, experience and presence on the ground as well as its convening and catalytic role which can help set global priorities and leverage and add value to existing and new initiatives at the local, national, regional and global levels.”⁴ It provides a focal point for establishing strategic direction, policy coherence and advocacy in relation to the global, ICT-based development agenda. Furthermore, the TF should “...develop a decentralized approach to cooperation on the basis of identification of problems and gaps in existing activities related to ICT for development.”⁵

This implies two significant points:

- first, that the TF should be aware of what is going on, on a global basis
- secondly, that the TF should rely on its stakeholders to advance solutions while the Task Force serves to bring together those that can help identify problems, sharing experiences for resolving them

The first point leads to the prime importance for the TF of gathering information on ICT for development projects and issues globally. This effort is well underway and the fruits of that effort can be seen

⁴ *ICT Task Force, Report of the Secretary General*, Section I, Role of the ICT Task Force, paragraph 16.

⁵ *ICT Task Force, Report of the Secretary General*, Section III. A general strategic framework for the ICT Task Force, Paragraph 19.

on the TF website. However greater efforts will need to be applied to ensure the relevance of information collected. One of the objectives of the Regional Networks and national nodes of those networks should be to continue collecting and systematizing such information that is relevant for their work. The purpose of this work is to enable the TF to identify best practices, disseminate that information, establish synergies between various projects and partners and overall, to successfully meet the terms of its mandate. The TF's role is in acting as a catalyst, encouraging synergy, helping to scale up successes and best practice, and serving as information exchange, analysis and synthesis forum for developing guidance on policy issues.

Leadership versus Operational

The stakeholders involved in the ICT TF sometimes have competing or even conflicting aims. Organizations, including multilateral, bilateral and civil society groups are often competing for influence, leadership, support, and attention. One reason that the TF is non-operational is to avoid simply introducing another competing voice in the chorus of ICT-for-development voices. As an entity with the goal of producing cooperation and synergy, it is quite appropriate that the TF should be a non-operational body. This assures that it is not looked at as a competitor, but rather as an "honest broker". The key role of the TF is to add synergic value to the on-going efforts of the stakeholders who make up the TF.

Another dimension of its leadership lies in encouraging or facilitating through stakeholders the preparation of analytical studies on cutting-edge ICT issues that have a direct bearing on development and poverty and disseminating their results widely through publications and its website. For example, the integration of ICT with PRSPs, ICT and HIV/AIDS, ICT and trade, the effects of the current downturn on developing countries, how to promote equity and participation in a market environment and making the case for and creating the underpinnings for mainstreaming ICT into development programmes are all areas where further deepening of knowledge and understanding is needed. The TF should foster intellectual leadership on such issues.

Promoting partnerships and Networks

This does not mean, however, that the TF cannot promote partnerships and initiatives. It is after all an organization that is charged with finding "out-the-box" approaches to ICT-for-development solutions. It is also expected to act as a catalyst to pull partners and resources together on key international initiatives, which can function autonomously. The TF may take leadership as it has started to do in a modest way in some areas, by conceiving and organizing targeted solutions to development challenges and seeking operational organizations to take up these solutions at their discretion.

In particular, the TF should pull together and mobilize support for policy and regulatory reforms, national and regional e-strategies, and human capacity-building, education and training. Because of its expertise, acquired knowledge, good will and broad support, including the operational organizations of the UN system, it should have a good opportunity to see such initiatives acted upon. However this function should be exercised with an eye to clear outcomes. It should be targeted primarily toward meeting as yet un-addressed needs that merit the highest-level attention. It should seek to identify where gaps exist, where new partnerships might be forged. The day-to-day focus of the TF will still be, monitoring, analysis, providing a forum for the exchange of informed opinion, and providing guidance and moral, networking and informational support to stakeholders.

For the longer-term perspective, the Task Force should aim to develop into a Web-based forum for sharing best practice experiences, forging partnerships, and enhancing coherence, complementarity and synergy among divergent ICT-for-development activities.

Aligning resources and actions to the Strategy

Even the best-conceived and most well-focused strategy will not succeed unless the resources and actions are fully aligned to its elements and objectives. The first and foremost task ahead is, therefore, for the TF, once the elements of this strategic approach are agreed upon, to commit themselves, individually and collectively, to contributing to its implementation.

As mentioned earlier, the Regional Nodes and the Working Groups are available to undertake this task, but they will need systematic institutional and financial support from TF member organizations – multilaterals, governments, business, non-profit and regional institutions. The TF, supported by the Secretariat, could lead and help coordinate the implementation of the strategy with quarterly reports to be submitted by the Bureau to TF members.

The Bureau should seek to coordinate the overall strategy to meet the goals of the TF Mandate. Each Working Group should develop its own strategy on the basis of the overall strategy of the Task Force. The Bureau should play a coordinating role on this process. The Task Force will, on the basis of reports from Working Groups, ascertain that the combined results of the WG strategies are contributing effectively to meeting the ultimate goals of the TF. The Task Force should synthesize the work of the Working Groups and distill the policy implications arising from their reports and agree on policy approaches which might be conveyed to the Secretary-General.

Strategic Responsibilities of Working Groups

Each working group will have two strategic responsibilities.

1. *Groundwork* The WGs, in collaboration with key multilateral institutions, should:
 - Analyze national and global efforts, build synergy, identify and build linkages between organizations that may benefit from cooperation.
 - Always keep in mind the objective of avoiding duplication of efforts, be aware of and build on previous and on-going projects.
 - Identify those areas that have not been addressed.
 - Develop their own strategic plans on the basis of the Task Force strategic objectives of a) MDGs; b) WSIS.
 - The reports of the Working Groups should be in a form to help the Task Force develop policy guidelines, best practices and overall strategy.
2. *New Strategic Solutions* – As a source of global cooperation and knowledge collection, analysis and dissemination, the ICT TF may be considered in many respects to be a global ‘think tank,’ one with the influence to effectively promote its concepts and recommended actions. Because the TF has an intrinsic interest in avoiding duplication and working primarily through existing initiatives it must be very thorough in reviewing all existing efforts and solutions before recommending anything new.

However when a WG does identify an area that has not been addressed and that is suitably important and global in significance to ICT-for-development, it may advocate and promote new solutions and solicit the appropriate operating organizations to implement the solutions.

Coordination and Synergy

As noted earlier, the TF Bureau has made considerable efforts to develop coordination and cooperation with other major global ICT initiatives. These efforts should be continued. The TF Working Groups should identify where opportunities exist to collaborate with other key players in order to best succeed in their goals. Collaboration with other "ICT for development" initiatives is key to the Task Force's success. In the spirit of the TF's multi-stakeholder effort, the TF Working Groups should use their role as forums to help stakeholders build partnerships with NGOs and other civil society actors.

Such opportunities as the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meetings, the ITU Plenipotentiary Conferences, the WSIS preparatory process should be used to develop collaborative approaches.

It is evident that more coordination is needed within the UN system on ICT related activities to maximize efficiency. The TF should promote such coordination and advise the Secretary-General on areas where synergies can be achieved. Efficient coordination is even more important in light of the upcoming WSIS.

In particular, the Task Force should play an important role in providing WSIS with a strong policy input so as to help focus its agenda. WSIS should be seen as a key set of milestones in the attainment of the MDGs.

The TF's vision and approach is similar to that of the Dot Force. The two have worked very closely. Similarly, synergy should be achieved with the DOT Force Implementation Teams. Many DOT Force Implementation Teams are already working closely with the respective TF Working Groups. The TF offers DOT Force stakeholders a good platform for reaching out to potential new partners and the DOT Force Implementation Network provides the TF with a well-established and dynamic network.

V. Annual Report:

The TF is mandated to submit an annual report to the Secretary-General. The first report will be due on 20 November 2002.

This report, once approved by the members, will be submitted to the Secretary-General who will present it to the Economic and Social Council. The strategic plan, as adopted by the Task Force membership meeting, shall be attached as an appendix to the Task Force report to be submitted to the Secretary-General.

The report should be very brief and focused on practical results achieved as a consequence of the work of the TF. The report should also be forward-looking and identify the priorities for the future in light of the current environment.

Among the elements to be included in the report, the following should be considered:

- (i) Current context and the international environment

- (ii) activities and initiatives undertaken by the TF during the first year, including tasks and initiatives undertaken by each of the Working Groups as well as the Regional Networks;
- (iii) the main challenges and problems faced by the TF;
- (iv) an action plan on how to tackle these challenges in the coming two years;
- (v) strategies/policy recommendations to achieve the goals of the TF.