



Fact sheet: ICT for sustainable development

Development challenges

At the United Nations Millennium Summit the international community defined the key development objectives as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). By the year 2015, the number of people living in poverty should be halved, primary education should be provided globally, health and sanitation should be improved, women should be empowered in order to combat HIV/AIDS and the loss of environmental resources should be reversed.

Above all, the Millennium Development Goals indicate the need to focus on human development. The gap between developed and developing countries' living conditions is tremendous and progress is needed in the very basic levels of human life: primary education and health care. Capacity building at the local level is a development process, which tackles the root causes of poverty. This process does not provide sudden changes, but leads to fruitful long-term results. This is the basis for sustainable development.

The consensus reached at the Millennium Summit reflects international community's shared view about the importance of fighting poverty and focusing on human development as well as the emerging sense that the international community is at a crossroads in the development process. The unprecedented pace and scale of global flows in information, products, capital, people and ideas, if properly harnessed, offers the potential to create new opportunities for those who have thus far been excluded from gains in human development.

ICT for sustainable development

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have made it possible to transfer information across nation borders, fast and for a low cost. Technology advances have created an economic boom for the developed world and the gap between developed and developing countries has grown even larger.

However, the use of ICT should not be limited to the developed world. Advanced technologies offer new opportunities for a creation of innovative solutions to move towards the Millennium Development Goals. At the micro level, ICT as a tool is relevant for achieving sustainable development by increasing the effectiveness and reach of development interventions, enhancing good governance and lowering the costs of service delivery. In a larger scale, ICT can be used as a tool to reach human development, sustainable growth, stronger economies and innovative education and health care systems.

Social and economic development is a complex issue depending on various factors and ICT alone cannot solve the developing world's problems. However, integration of ICT into overall national and regional development strategies expands the scope and coverage of development interventions and when combined with other factors, increases the overall results of the strategies. Information and communication technologies have the power to influence all aspects of human life - these opportunities should be equal to all.



UN ICT Task Force

The UN ICT Task Force was launched by the Secretary-General in November 2001 in order to harness the power of technology at the service of development. It is a UN endeavor that aims at fully incorporating representatives from public and private sectors, non-profit organizations, and civil society as equal members. The Task Force's membership includes some of the world's most prominent business leaders as full-fledged members whose decision-making power is equal to that of the representation of governments and multilateral organizations. Each member offers an unique perspective and expertise from their respective fields. Through this system of collective input, the Task Force has already achieved a common understanding on priorities and tasks, as well as on most effective modalities for achieving the goals set out in its mandate.

The Task Force is a forum for addressing policy issues and a platform for launching public-private partnerships. It works to harmonize economic and profit motives of the private sector with the human development -oriented goals, in order to ensure sustainable results and harmonious development of a global networked society. In this respect, it can help in making a tangible difference in priority areas such as the regulatory environment, low-cost access, human resources development and capacity building and entrepreneurship. The objective is to create a win-win situation, where the goals of the private sector, based primarily on the profit/loss criteria, would be increasingly complementary and mutually reinforcing with broad development goals that we in the United Nations work to advance.