



Commonwealth Telecommunication Organisation

Statement on the Role of ICTs in the post-2015 Development Goals.

Context

The very rapid growth and expansion in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has been one of the most dramatic changes to the world's development context since the launching of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. ICTs are both a key sector for economic growth and transformation, and also a critically important enabler of wider social, cultural and political development.

In the original MDGs, ICTs were specifically referred to in the sixth target of Goal 8 (to "Create a global partnership for development with targets for aid, trade and debt relief")¹, which stated that "In cooperation with the private sector, make available benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications"².

Formal discussion over the new goals to be adopted by the international community in the period after 2015 has so far placed insufficient emphasis on the potential of ICTs to transform development.³ The UN High Level Panel, for example, identified 12 universal goals and 54 national targets; none of the goals referred directly to ICTs, and only one target (within Goal 8) mentioned them in the context of jobs and growth: "Strengthen productive capacity by providing universal access to financial services and infrastructure such as transportation and ICT". Similarly, the outcome document of the Open Working Group for Sustainable Development has identified 17 goals each with numerous targets, but once again ICTs are not specifically mentioned as one of the goals. They are, though, included four times within the targets, in the context of capacity building, education, women's empowerment, and access to the Internet.⁴ The most powerful of these is the intent in Target 4b to "significantly increase access to ICT and strive to provide universal and affordable access to internet in LDCs by 2020".

The reasons for this relative lack of emphasis on ICTs in the post-2015 agenda are complex, but largely reflect two perspectives: a belief that ICTs are essentially the domain of the private sector; and the powerful lobbying of other development-focused interest groups which has ensured that their agendas feature prominently in the post-2015 discourse.

¹ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/global.shtml>

² <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/global.shtml>

³ See also the United Nations Group on the Information Society's (UNGIS) Joint Statement of May 2013 <http://www.ungis.org/Portals/0/documents/JointInitiatives/UNGIS.Joint.Statement.pdf>

⁴ "17.8 fully operationalize the Technology Bank and STI (Science, Technology and Innovation) capacity building mechanism for LDCs by 2017, and enhance the use of enabling technologies in particular ICT"; "4.b by 2020 expand by x% globally the number of scholarships for developing countries in particular LDCs, SIDS and African countries to enrol in higher education, including vocational training, ICT, technical, engineering and scientific programmes in developed countries and other developing countries"; "5.b enhance the use of enabling technologies, in particular ICT, to promote women's empowerment", and "9.c significantly increase access to ICT and strive to provide universal and affordable access to internet in LDCs by 2020"



As the ITU noted in its 2013 *Measuring the Information Society* report, “While it is not clear yet how ICTs will be reflected in future international development goals, there is no doubt that they will continue to permeate all sectors of society and the economy and become increasingly indispensable”.⁵ The failure to have targets relating to ICTs more widely embedded in global thinking on the post-2015 goals is cause for considerable concern, particularly in the light of the significant efforts to build on the conclusions and recommendations of the 2003 and 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development’s *Final WSIS Targets Review*,⁶ which brings together numerous UN bodies under the co-ordination of the ITU, has highlighted delivery against the 11 amended WSIS targets.

The powerful role of ICTs in contributing to economic growth, and also in shaping social, cultural and political development, has meant that those countries, communities and individuals with access to such technologies and the ability to use them for their development objectives have been able to accelerate dramatically ahead of those without such access or ability. The apparent assumption that the private sector alone can deliver ICT-enhanced development for all is thus misplaced. The effective use of ICTs to secure development objectives requires focused engagement and involvement of governments and civil society alongside the efforts of the private sector. Only through such collaborative processes can there be real and lasting benefits from their transformative development potential.

Principles

Drawing on existing widely accepted principles by the ITU, UNESCO, UNCTAD, and other international agencies, members of the CTO affirm the following principles with respect to the role of ICTs in the post-2015 development agenda:

1. ICTs have transformed economic, social, cultural and political systems across the Commonwealth since 2000, and should therefore feature prominently in any agreement on the post-2015 development goals.
2. ICTs, as an accelerator of “development”, have had a significant differential impact on the life opportunities of citizens across the Commonwealth, specifically between those who have access to them and the knowledge of how best to utilise the technologies, and those who do not.
3. The role of ICTs in accentuating existing differences between people from contrasting backgrounds living in different places requires specific focus if there is to be equitable and sustainable development.
4. Goals and targets relating to the role of ICTs for development should therefore ensure that they address the needs and interests of the poorest and most marginalised individuals and groups within society.
5. Governments, as the guarantors of the interests of the poorest and most marginalised in any society, therefore have a crucial role to play in ensuring that ICTs are used effectively for development purposes in their respective countries.
6. ICT-related goals and targets should be technology-neutral, so as to maximise the potential of all technologies to deliver effective development interventions, and to create

⁵ ITU (2013) *Measuring the Information Society*, Geneva: ITU, p.13

⁶ Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development (2014) *Final WSIS Targets Review Achievements, Challenges and the Way Forward*, Geneva: ITU

the conditions for new, innovative ICT-related development solutions.

7. Countries should be encouraged to develop optimal solutions that are best suited to their own needs and contexts, drawing on those good practices identified elsewhere that can be adapted for their own circumstances. Likewise, governments should identify the most appropriate specific targets for their own peoples, within a broad framework that highlights a clearly defined set of overall ICT-related goals and targets.
8. Two distinct aspects of ICTs should be recognised in any post-2015 development agenda: the availability of ICT infrastructure, particularly including electricity; and the ability of the poorest and most marginalised to use ICTs to their advantage.

Goals and Targets

In line with the principles above, the CTO suggests that a small number of overall development goals should be elaborated, along with a range of possible targets that countries can select as they see fit. To be effective, all goals and targets must be measurable, and must focus explicitly on “development” agendas that address the needs of the poorest and most marginalised.

Suggested ICT Goal

Given the importance of ICTs as an enabler for development, there should be explicit focus on their use for development. We recommend that this should be along the lines of:

- *Relevant ICTs are universally accessible and are used effectively for development interventions.*

This goal combines both the principles of *universal access* and the use of ICTs for *practical development interventions* that deliver on the needs of the poorest and most marginalised. Whilst we support the ideas behind Target 4b of the Open Working Group’s proposal that we should “increase access to ICT and strive to provide universal and affordable access to internet in LDCs by 2020”, we place additional emphasise on the need to ensure that this access is used for development purposes, including social, cultural and political development as well as the more usually articulated economic growth, and that clear targets are set to hold peoples and governments to account.

ICT Targets

Within this overall goal, a range of specific targets should be established from which governments can select, based on their specific needs. Such targets might be constructed around the following broad guidelines and categories:

- *Percentage of households or individuals connected to the latest technology by a given date;*
- *Percentage of people using the Internet for ‘development’ purpose, such as education, health, or rural development*
- *Percentage of members of particular marginalised groups actively using digital technologies.*

The use of the word “development” is left open deliberately, recognising that there are many different definitions thereof. Such an approach also allows governments to select the most appropriate development targets based on internal discussions with relevant stakeholders.



In this regard, specific targets selected by a government using the above guidelines might thus include:

- 50% of households connected to >100 Mb Broadband by 2020;
- 75% of children of school age using the Internet for learning by 2020;
- 50% of farmers using ICTs to gain information about agricultural practices by 2020
- 100% of people with disabilities provided with assistive digital technologies by 2020.

Advocacy

This statement has been prepared by the Secretariat of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation following consultation with members. It is intended as a contribution to the ongoing debate about the post-2015 development agenda, and we encourage members and other likeminded organisations and individuals to use it in their advocacy for the inclusion of ICTs as a prominent element of the goals and targets arising from this agenda.

For ICTs to be used effectively for development interventions, there must be *affordable and universal access*.

7th October 2014