



LOUDER VOICES

Summary of the CTO/Panos Study on Strengthening Developing Country Participation in International ICT Decision-Making



International decisions about information and communications technologies (ICTs) have far-reaching implications for developing countries. Yet developing countries are poorly represented when agendas are set and decisions made.

At its Genoa Summit in 2001, the G8 asked its Digital Opportunities Task Force (DOT Force) to draw up proposals to promote more effective universal participation in international ICT decision-making.

This brochure summarises the results and recommendations of a study commissioned by the United Kingdom Department for International Development in support of this DOT Force objective. The study, undertaken for DFID by the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) and Panos London in the first half of 2002, had three main objectives:

- to map the international ICT decision-making world;
- to assess current developing country participation and identify obstacles to effective engagement; and
- to recommend actions to be taken by developing countries, international agencies and DOT Force members.

It included detailed studies of three international institutions and the involvement of six developing countries.

The recommendations contained in this brochure set out six practical initiatives for action that would give a louder voice to developing countries in international ICT decision-making. They were presented to the DOT Force in May 2002 and to the G8 Summit in Kananaskis, Canada in June 2002.



In its report to the July 2001 G8 Genoa Summit, the Digital Opportunity Task Force recognised that decisions about information and communications technology made by international bodies frequently have major implications for developing countries. However, these bodies do not always consider developing country needs and take them into account. Sometimes this is because developing country representatives are not present when agendas are set and decisions made. Often it is because developing countries – although present at meetings – lack the capacity to analyse issues, prepare positions, and advance their interests. For all these reasons, the DOT Force therefore recommended that members of the development community should work together to establish and support effective universal participation in international ICT decision-making fora.

The G8 accepted this recommendation of the DOT Force and directed it to begin following it through as part of the Genoa Plan of Action. To help with this task, the U.K. Department for International Development commissioned the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation and Panos London to undertake a scoping study to:

- map international ICT decision-making issues, processes and fora;
- assess the effectiveness of current developing country participation;
- identify obstacles facing developing countries at the national, regional and international levels;
- recommend actions that could be taken by developing countries themselves, international organisations, and DOT Force members to overcome these obstacles.

The CTO/Panos study team did extensive research on a wide range of international ICT fora and issues; carried out detailed reviews of developing country participation in three important institutions – ITU, WTO and ICANN; and engaged local experts to study the experience of six developing countries – Brazil, India, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia.



I. MAPPING THE CHALLENGES

In mapping the international ICT decision-making universe, four challenges stand out in the CTO/Panos study:

First, most many developing countries are members of established intergovernmental organisations with ICT responsibilities, such as the ITU and WTO, and are usually represented at their meetings.

However, there is not as yet an effective connection between the agendas of these organisations, their decisions, and the international development goals set out in the UN Millennium Declaration. In spite of considerable effort, there is still a “missing link” between ICT and development at the international policy level.

Second, developing countries have very little presence or influence in the many voluntary, private, and not-for-profit decision-making fora that have been set up in recent years to standardise and manage the Internet and other new ICTs. They have none at all in areas where standards are determined de facto by market power. Although the results of some of this work are fed into traditional international fora – and although some of the new fora, such as ICANN, are attempting to include developing countries in their decision-making processes – it is clear that developing countries are increasingly excluded from international decision-making at the technical level.

Third, the experience of many developed and some developing countries shows that technical and policy capacity go hand in hand, so that it is difficult to develop one without the other. Given present asymmetries in technical capacity, it is essential for developing countries to set priorities among international ICT issues and concentrate their limited resources on building technical and policy capacity in the areas that are most critical to their development goals.

Fourth, it is important to emphasise that effective participation is not limited to what happens before and during meetings. The goal of inclusion means that developing countries must also have the capacity to assess the effect of decisions made by international ICT fora on their own development objectives, and to participate in the implementation of these decisions in their own countries, whether or not they were present when they were made.

So what are the obstacles and what can be done to overcome them?

II. BUILDING DEVELOPING COUNTRY ICT POLICY CAPACITY

There was consensus among those consulted for the study that it is not possible to strengthen participation by developing countries in international ICT decision-making fora without first strengthening their capacity to make and implement ICT policy at the national and regional levels.

1. Creating ICT policy awareness

Lack of policy awareness was frequently cited as the most significant barrier to developing country participation in international ICT decision-making.

The basic problem, in the opinion of many, is lack of awareness of the role that ICTs can play in development. This exists at all levels in many developing countries, where people simply have no experience with ICT and its potential benefits. In the longer term, this problem will gradually disappear as people gain access to ICT, see it applied in their daily lives, and begin to use it.

More immediately, there is lack of awareness among policy-makers of the importance of international decisions for national ICT policies and regulations.

To help address this immediate problem, we recommend that:

- International ICT fora should promote awareness of the role that ICTs can (and can not) play in development by providing comprehensive, publicly-accessible, non-technical information on the relevance of their activities to the development agenda, illustrated by stories of both success and failure;
- eStrategies for achieving development goals formulated by developing countries (for example with the assistance of the DOT Force International eDevelopment Resource Network) should include actions to address international ICT policy and regulatory issues in line with national development priorities.

2. Building technical and policy capacity

Lack of technical and policy capacity on ICT issues is viewed as a fundamental obstacle to effective participation by developing countries, particularly with respect to emerging issues such as the migration from circuit-switched to IP-based networks, the implementation of third generation mobile communication systems, and e-commerce.

Since technical and policy capacity can only be developed through years of education and work experience, we recognise that there is no quick and easy way to overcome barriers in this area. It is also clear that the technical assistance activities of many international organisations make only a modest contribution to this long-term objective, and that new approaches are needed.

To help developing countries build policy and technical capacity, we recommend that:

- international ICT fora should provide independent, authoritative technical/policy research and analysis of major issues to be decided;
- the DOT Force Implementation Network should:
 - support the establishment, operation and maintenance of a global network of independent institutes for public and policy research on international ICT policy and regulatory issues, with nodes in all developing regions;
 - establish a fund to support small-scale research activities, including country case studies, by southern institutions on issues relevant to international ICT decision-making.

3. Strengthening national policy institutions and processes

Weaknesses in national and regional ICT policy processes and institutions drew more comment to the study than any of the other barriers to effective participation. At the national level, reported weaknesses included:

- lack of political leadership;
- absence of national ICT strategies;
- ineffective coordination between different government departments and agencies with ICT responsibilities;
- inadequate preparation for international meetings; and
- ineffective use of financial and human resources.

The absence in many developing countries of ICT policy processes that are open to participation by all stakeholders and based on informed public discussion was repeatedly identified as a fundamental weakness, as was the absence of effective regional policy fora.

To help strengthen policy institutions and processes in developing countries in the longer term, we recommend that:

- developing countries should take action to:



- improve information flows and policy coordination between different government departments and agencies with ICT responsibilities;
- promote informed public discussion and debate through both general and specialised media;
- include all relevant stakeholders in policymaking on an issue-by-issue basis;
- encourage participation of experts from the private sector and civil society in national delegations to international decision-making fora;
- share information, expertise and experience on a sub-regional and regional basis;
- implement knowledge management techniques to ensure that information gained through participation in international ICT decision-making fora is captured, disseminated to relevant stakeholders, and made accessible to other interested parties through the media.

To begin immediately the work of fostering and catalysing policy processes of this kind, we recommend that:

- The DOT Force Implementation Network should support the development and application of model national ICT policy processes in relation to key international issues of concern to developing countries, such as the World Summit on the Information Society, work in the ITU on IP telephony and 3rd generation mobile systems, negotiations in the WTO on e-commerce, and the development in ICANN of ccTLD dispute resolution mechanisms.

III. LEVELLING THE INTERNATIONAL ICT POLICY PLAYING FIELD

There was also consensus among those consulted for the study that action to strengthen the ICT policy capacity of developing countries must be accompanied by action to level the policy playing field so as to ensure that the needs of developing countries are on the agenda of international ICT fora and that they are included in decision-making processes.

4. Providing access to information about the international ICT policy agenda

Lack of easy, affordable and timely access to information about ICT-related issues, decision-making fora and processes was consistently mentioned as an important barrier to developing country participation by government and other stakeholders. The rapid increase that has taken place both in the range of issues on the international ICT policy agenda and in the number of organisations involved in ICT policy-making has made it very difficult for developing countries to keep track of what is going

on, to anticipate key events, and to plan strategies for successful outcomes.

To help ensure that all relevant stakeholders have easy, affordable and timely access to information about items on the international agenda, we recommend that:

- the DOT Force Implementation Network should develop and implement a programme to provide authoritative, web-based information on international ICT decision-making to developing countries – for example by building on experience gained in the pilot phase of the CTO/Panos ictdevagenda web site, and through the creation of a “one-click” electronic library of documents related to international ICT policy and regulatory issues.

5. Improving the structure, functioning and working methods of international ICT policy fora

Some of the fora examined in the study have made efforts to include developing countries in decision-making processes, for example by ensuring that management bodies include developing country representatives, sponsoring regional preparatory meetings, and providing fellowships to LDC participants in international events.

There is a general view that such measures will not result in effective participation until underlying weaknesses in developing country technical and policy capacity are addressed. In the short term, however, the study identified a number of improvements that could be made by international fora to make it easier for developing countries to participate in their activities.

To facilitate developing country participation, we recommend that:

- international ICT decision-making fora should:
 - hold meetings in developing regions in a way that minimises travel costs for developing country participants;
 - avoid simultaneously scheduling important events;
 - ensure that their procedures allow all sources of developing country policy and technical capacity to participate in decision-making, whether they come from government, the private sector or not-for-profit organisations.

As well as improving existing operations, there is clearly a need for the international community to re-think the basis of ICT global governance in light of the dramatic changes that have taken place in the ICT sector in recent years, and to make the connection between ICT and sustainable development.

To lay the foundations for improvements to the international ICT governance regime, we recommend that:

- the DOT Force Implementation Network should:
 - promote joined-up thinking among G8 governments with the aim of making links between technology, trade and development issues, and of encouraging analysis and assessment of the impact of commercial decisions on developing countries;
 - encourage international ICT fora to permit and facilitate NGO participation in their activities, if they do not already do so;
 - launch a programme to study, discuss and develop new global ICT governance models that would provide greater coherence between different policy and regulatory domains, link ICT decision-making with development goals, and provide for effective participation by government, the private sector and civil society from both developed and developing countries.

6. Making effective use of financial resources

Financial barriers were not generally cited as a major obstacle to developing country participation. Instead, concern was very frequently expressed that financial resources currently allocated

to support developing country participation by international fora and other bodies are not always used effectively. It appears that some fellowship programmes result in “the wrong people attending meetings for the wrong reasons”.

To make more effective use of financial resources intended to support developing country participation, we recommend that:

- developing countries should review their current practices with respect to meeting preparation, delegate selection, participation, accountability and follow-up, with a view to ensuring that these practices result in the most effective use of financial resources through the optimum deployment and development of technical and policy capacity.

To assist in this process, we recommend that:

- the DOT Force Implementation Network, under the leadership of its developing country members, should develop a code of practice for programmes intended to develop and engage technical and policy capacity in international ICT decision-making (e.g. by supporting education and training, exchanges and detachments, participation in meeting) to ensure that access to these programmes is based on qualifications, and that performance is evaluated.



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This report has been prepared for DFID and the G8 DOT Force Implementation Team by the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation and Panos at the behest of the Government of the United Kingdom. The views of the consultants are not necessarily shared by the British Government.

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The Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) is an international partnership between governments, businesses and civil society organisations focused on ICTs and development: www.cto.int.

Panos London is an international communication organisation which works to enable developing countries to shape and communicate their own development agendas through informed public debate.

Copies of the full report can be obtained from CTO, 26/27 Oxendon Street, London SW1Y 4EL, UK; +44 20 7839 1381; info@cto.int.