

ICT for Development and the MDGs

There is now growing evidence of the role that ICT can play in enhancing development. In recognition of this, the UN Millennium Declaration outlines a focus on partnerships with the private sector to "ensure that the benefits of new technologies, specially information and communication technologies ... are available to all."

In spite of this enabling potential and role, ICT is yet to be widely mainstreamed to assist developing countries in addressing traditional development problems with innovative solutions and approaches that are both effective and more easily scalable and replicable. UNDP has been a pioneer in this area from the early stages, building on its many natural advantages: a global network, a broad development mandate that connects it with all development stakeholders, and its expertise on the ground. Its approach moves beyond an often more singular focus on infrastructure and access on the one hand or on stand-alone projects on the other. It recognises the importance of a holistic and multi-sectoral framework and partnership approach that can more effectively harness the role of development (ICT-D) both as an *enabler* of development as well as an *enhancer* of capacity development at the individual, community, organisational, systemic and societal levels. In its development strategy, there is a focus on mainstreaming ICT to effectively contribute to achievement of the MDGs, particularly those related to income poverty reduction, education, health, environment and gender equity through:

- creating economic opportunities & contributing to poverty reduction;
- managing the processes of providing basic services (e.g. healthcare, education) at lower cost and with greater coverage;
- facilitating access to information and the involvement of stakeholders through greater transparency and support to networking at every stage; and
- enhancing the capacity to measure, monitor and report progress on the goals and strategize.

More specifically, efforts to assist countries in enhancing the achievement of the MDGs through the ICTD practice area are as follows.

Service Line 1: Development of ICTD Strategies and Policies

The preparation of policy frameworks and national strategies and the integration of ICT into key national development priorities such as Poverty Reduction Strategies, PRSPs and national competitiveness agendas are critical for harnessing ICT's development potential. These frameworks help to identify, and the strategies help countries to prioritise, actions and programmes where ICT can be more effectively deployed to achieve MDGs in two broad ways:

- fostering an enabling environment for greater ICT use through measures such as support to increased competition in the telecommunication and IT sectors, adoption of strategies and partnerships to enhance access and deployment at affordable costs, (helping to meet ICT MDG targets such as ICT access and computer use per head - Goal 8) as well as capacity development and incentives for enterprise; and
- elucidating the policy choices and prioritisation of actions for the increasing use of ICTs in government systems and in the delivery of public services in the fields of education, health and environmental management to enhance achievement of specific MDGs.

Assistance with assessments, strengthening national consultation processes and the development of strategies that are prioritised, more implementable and fundable are major components of UNDP's ICTD strategy. Mozambique and Azerbaijan provide examples of recent successes in this area.

Service Line 2: Enhancing Government Capacity and Public Services

UNDP assists with practical implementation of identified strategic priorities *through* the public sector, helping countries to achieve the MDGs in at least three ways:

- deploy ICT to enhance efficiency & effectiveness of intra-governmental operations and the delivery of government services;

- deploy ICT to strengthen decentralization, local governance and the service delivery & advocacy capacities of local groups; and
- deploy ICT to address national MDG priorities; in synergy with UNDG and country team efforts, support capacity development for the development of more effective national systems for the benchmarking, measurement and monitoring of the MDG indicators and evaluating social impact of measures adopted.

In India, UNDP has supported to innovative deployment of ICT in the context of decentralization. In Albania there is a focus on deploying ICT in delivering services that also enhance investment. UNDP assistance in developing national poverty observatories and monitoring systems is important in many parts of Africa. It is now beginning to assist countries in effectively deploying ICT in these contexts.

Service Line 3: Strengthening Citizen Participation, Promoting Entrepreneurship

Increasingly, it is becoming evident that practical implementation of strategic priorities *through* the private sector as well as non-governmental actors who can reach grassroots levels ("the poorest of the poor") and directly address market failure (and absence) at the local level is critical to enhancing access to the benefits of ICT. UNDP assists countries in enhancing the achievement of the MDGs through:

- deploying ICT to improve citizen access to information and expanding the scope and impact of public sector interventions through support to community initiatives and public-private partnerships addressing health, education, and concerns related to the creation of economic opportunities.
- using ICT to strengthen capacities of NGOs & community organisations to advocate and promote local development and monitor the achievement of the MDGs.
- using ICT to create locally relevant content, enhance equity in education and support training of marginalized groups, including youth, women and the disabled; and
- promoting entrepreneurship and applying ICT in SMMEs to improve their competitiveness, internal efficiencies & market reach, supporting job creation and poverty reduction.

Early UNDP efforts in this area include initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Networking Programme that extended to over 40 countries and supported community networking, capacity development and awareness-raising regarding the potential of ICT for development. In Ecuador, UNDP has provided support to SMMEs, with Ecuador's first Entrepreneurial Development Agency evolving out of a UNDP supported pilot.

Service Line 4: - Global Issues, Local Responses -Networking National Stakeholders

Many developing countries have yet to fully grasp the importance and the potential impact of emerging global issues such as modalities, standards and procedures for addressing Internet Governance (e.g. ICANN), Intellectual Property rights (e.g. TRIPs), as well as opportunities that the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) provides. UNDP seeks to assist countries in participating more effectively in global processes and in developing capacity to make informed choices about issues that have an impact on the enabling environment for ICT access and deployment. More specifically, it supports countries in addressing the achievement of the MDGs in the following ways:

- promoting awareness and enhancing the capacity of stakeholders and decision-makers to engage in the development process and address global issues affecting the achievement of the MDGs;
- creating and supporting networks enhancing the participation of stakeholders in governance processes which have an impact on the achievement of MDGs;
- disseminating knowledge and resources on good practices, particularly through fostering of South-South networking and technical cooperation; and
- supporting the creation of an ecatalogue and toolkit on ICT for MDGs, mapping examples of effective approaches relevant to the various MDGs to facilitate advocacy and enhance impact.

UNDP has provided assistance on Internet governance in a wide range of countries that include Afghanistan, Benin, Jamaica, Honduras, Malawi, and Pakistan. It is active in supporting regional preparatory and prepcom processes for the WSIS.