

Helsinki Process ICT Track Roadmap

Promoting the use of Information and Communication Technology

Facilitator: Egypt

Egypt is committed to leading the effort of the ICT Track of the Helsinki Process in full coordination with regional and global stakeholders.

Egypt chairs the Executive Bureau of the Arab ICT Ministers Council, and is an active member in all the affiliated Arab Working Groups.

Egypt also hosted the first Council of ICT Ministers of the African Union in April 2006.

Egypt is a member of the Global Alliance (formerly the ICT Task Force), and was a member of the Internet Governance Forum as well as all the regional and most of the international working groups preparing for the WSIS "World Summit on the Information Society".

Background

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has a critical role to play in development efforts around the world and has been dubbed as a catalyst for positive change in both developed and developing countries. The Information Society is not just about technology; it is about what technology can achieve for people and their pressing needs: a challenge that requires innovation.

The digital divide is a complicated issue, especially for developing countries, it can not be resolved without the concerted efforts of diverse constituents. In multi-stakeholder partnerships, the capacities and resources of participating organizations complement each other and create synergy that enables shared goals to be accomplished. Public-Private Partnership is recognized as one of the main principles in any successful effort and activity in ICT.

Knowledge and information have become the keys to competitiveness of nations. Information and Communication Technologies are improving the efficiency of interaction and interrelations among agencies nationally, regionally and globally. ICT brings new ways and means for networking as well as changing the patterns of delivering services to the public. ICT does not only help nations develop their own productivity, but, helps sustain development to transform countries to advanced knowledge-based economies.

The World Summit on the Information Society was able to engage the information and communication technology sector irrevocably in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, that are looked at as actual targets to be realized. The core commitment of WSIS is to build a people-centered, inclusive and development oriented Information Society and the Summit's successes have provided the necessary momentum to address effectively many pressing global issues, particularly in the area of ICTs.

In this respect, WSIS offered some guidelines to pursue regarding the role and responsibilities of all stakeholders. Para 3 of the Geneva Plan of Action states that:

- Governments are to play a leading role in developing and implementing comprehensive, forward looking and sustainable national e-strategies.
- Private Sector's commitment is important not only as a market player but also plays a role in a wider sustainable development context.
- Civil society's involvement is equally important in creating the equitable Information Society and in implementing ICT related initiatives for development.

As outlined earlier, the Helsinki Process offers an opportunity to support international dialogue, cooperation and partnership in order to harness the new technology for the benefit of all.

Since Helsinki Process is a multi-stakeholder forum between North and South, there is a great need to integrate efforts of the Group of Friends aiming at accelerating the bridging of the digital divide. And to get this target done, we need to mobilize all the available resources in an innovative way.

Mission:

The mission of the Helsinki Process in the ICT Track is to draft an applicable and effective plan of action among the Helsinki Group of Friends in order to:

- Move from principles to actions in building the global information society.
- Explore the potential of all stakeholders, within Helsinki Friends, in using ICT for development.
- Capture the full potential of the information and communication revolution for human development by pursuing and promoting the concept of the "Knowledge Society" that goes in its applications beyond the technology and connectivity issues.
- Improve the identification and measurement of the actual dissemination and impact of ICT.

Proposals for Action

ICT driven by the convergence of computers, telecommunications and traditional media, are crucial for the knowledge-based economy. Rapid advances in technology and the diminishing cost of acquiring the new ICT tools have opened new windows of opportunity for least developing countries to accelerate their economic growth and development.

The least developing countries are facing a severe problem in resources, so they lack the appropriate technology to solve their problems, the qualified human resources to implement the developing process, the enabling environment, and the available financial mechanisms needed to finance all their needs.

The Friends of Helsinki are invited to contribute to the provision of a viable framework for cooperation and coordination to design effective models within Helsinki Group for such a

Partnership that would include Public and Private Sector as well as civil society and international organizations.

Areas of focus:

The following areas are proposed for concrete actions:

A) ICT Infrastructure:

Poor ICT infrastructure, combined with weak policy and regulatory frameworks and limited human resources, have resulted in inadequate access to affordable telephones, broadcasting, computers and the Internet. In some countries the available teledensity remains below one line per 100 people.

Service costs are also high and the connection cost averages 20 per cent of GDP per capita, compared with the world average of 9%, and 1% for high-income countries. Many areas have been unable to capitalize on ICT as a tool in enhancing livelihoods and creating new business opportunities, and cross-border linkages with global markets have been constrained. Although many countries have started ICT policy reforms, service penetration, quality and tariffs have not yet improved.

Helsinki process is invited to find the suitable mechanism to deal with this situation as part of the global effort to bridge the digital divide.

B) The Enabling Environment:

Governments play a key role in the development of ICTs and telecommunications and are urged to establish and develop an enabling environment which promotes reasonable and affordable access to basic telecommunication services for all. Such an environment should create a stable and transparent framework and promote fair competition, while protecting network integrity and guaranteeing the rights of users, operators and investors.

The Helsinki Process should pursue the dissemination of best practices in drafting policies and strategies for the development of telecommunications that would reflect the trend towards multi-services utilizing a common infrastructure platform.

C) Financing ICT for Development:

The WSIS concluded a process that dealt with the problems facing financing ICT for development. It recognized the existence of the digital divide and the challenges it poses for many countries, which are forced to choose between many competing objectives in their development planning and in demands for development funds whilst having limited resources.

WSIS, based on the conclusion of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms created by the UN Secretary General, recognized the scale of the problem in bridging the digital divide, which will require adequate and sustainable investments in ICT infrastructure and services, and capacity building, and transfer of technology over many years to come.

The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society recommended in para 27 some improvements and innovations in existing financing mechanisms. The Helsinki Group is invited to provide for a forum that would focus on examining those improvements and innovations for the selection of some to apply within the Group.

D) Capacity Building:

Capacity Building is a long term process that is well defined when addressing the issues related to Information Society. Countries, in particular developing countries, should define national strategies, policies and plans for the purpose of ensuring the scientific as well as technological capacity for the benefit of sustainable development through good management of ICTs.

It is important to identify and share innovative practices among Helsinki Group for promoting human resources and skills. In this regard, a multi-stakeholder approach involving scientific and technological community is essential to enrich education, training and awareness of the benefits of ICTs for development and progress. Civil society is a critical partner in catalyzing actions and awareness of small communities.

Helsinki Process can design a concrete plan for supporting the capacity building efforts of the Group with a view that would incorporate support for higher education and relevant research programs in ICT as to ensure easy access to resources of IT.

E-Strategies:

E-Strategy can prioritize and guide national development, and they are recognized to promote and coordinate ICT investment and extend their benefits to larger segments of the population.

E-strategies are adopted and implemented in many countries aiming to expand ICT use in governments and schools, expand telecommunications infrastructure and provide an adequate legal and regulatory framework. However, concrete actions identified to achieve these goals vary considerably for many reasons, partly because of income differences across countries.

Helsinki Process, should address such an area to provide stronger links to broader development goals. The likely development impact of an e-strategy can be assessed by evaluating its:

- links to the country's overall development, economic and social goals;
- use of indicators to benchmark analysis and formulate clear and realistic goals and targets;
- implementation mechanisms, including institutions, processes and resources; and
- monitoring and evaluating mechanisms, especially the responsibilities and budgets for these efforts.

The end target should be to further disseminate the use of ICTs and telecommunication networks to enhance access and use of secure, cost effective and socio-economically beneficial value added ICT services.

Helsinki Process should focus on facilitating the development of e-strategies and e-applications in order to ensure the sustainability and affordability in the development of telecommunications and ICTs to contribute towards reducing the social divide, improving quality of life, good governance, better access to health services, distance learning. In this regard the requirements and conditions of rural areas and underserved communities should be taken into account.

Proposals for Action:

Helsinki Group of Friends could agree on working together through exchange of expertise and best practices as well as through designing programs within Helsinki Process for the following areas: E learning, E health and E content.

A) E learning: the goal is :

- To raise the competitiveness of the labor force for serving local & international markets.
- To spread knowledge by using new interactive models through the Internet.
- To support the efforts of the Ministries of Education and Higher-Education in integrating IT into the education system.

Work shall be pursued on two main levels:

1- Pre-University Education, through:

- o Extensive use of ICT in schools.
- o Qualifying students and teachers.
- o Improving teaching and educational methods.
- o Transforming schools into productive units and community learning centers.

2- Higher Education, through:

- o Technology Infrastructure.
- o Network for universities & research institutions among Helsinki Group of Friends.
- o Supporting internal ICT framework in different universities.
- o Establishing ICT clubs in colleges.
- o Establishing science and technology portals within Helsinki Friends to support Research & Development.

B) E health: the goal is:

- To assist in enhancing & increasing the quality of medical care by:
 - i. Promoting the scientific level for doctors and nursing institutes especially in rural areas.
 - ii. Developing the life long learning medical training.
 - iii. Reduce the time, effort and cost for medical care.
- To increase efficiency, transparency, decision making support, timely communications and remove redundancy in order to achieve:

- efficient distribution of resources, Documenting decisions and linking it to the national ID number.
- Provide a distributed system where citizens can apply remotely for getting the medical help with no need for transportation to central locations.
- Develop quality control and performance evaluation systems to guarantee the delivery of subsidy to those for whom it is intended, and guarantee system efficiency.

C) E content:

- The overall initiative goal is to enhance the competitiveness of content industry by supporting the production, use and distribution of digital content on the global networks.
- The operational initiative goals are:
 - Improving access to and expanding the use of content
 - Finding new business and revenue sharing models
 - Increasing the dynamism of the digital content market