

**Panel Discussion on “Monitoring and Reviewing National Strategies:
Exchange of Experience at the Regional Level”
WSIS Geneva, 11 December 2003**

This Panel Discussion was part of a parallel event organized jointly by the United Nations Regional Commissions (UNECA, UNECE, UNECLAC, UNESCAP, UNESCWA), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (UN ICT Task Force), during the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva on 10 and 11 December 2003.

Following are the proceedings of the Panel Discussion.

Stability Pact’s electronic South Eastern European (e-SEE) Initiative

Mr. John Riddle of the Stability Pact described his organization’s “electronic South Eastern European (e-SEE) Initiative”. The e-SEE Initiative covers the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova and was launched in October 2001. It follows the European Union’s e-Europe Programme and promotes best practices, benchmarking and regional cooperation.

Key political agreements supporting the e-SEE Initiative include a Joint Ministerial Letter of Intent, the adoption of the e-SEE Agenda for Development of the Information Society, terms of reference for State Information Society Bodies, and common guidelines for national Information Society Bodies.

The countries taking part in the e-SEE Initiative have met four times to date, and they are making good progress.

In the future, the e-SEE Initiative will introduce more regional Information Society benchmarking procedures; pay increased attention to financing projects on e-government, e-education and e-commerce; seek to strengthen dialogue between signatories and supporting countries and organizations; and eventually be incorporated into the e-Europe+ programme.

Comments from the Moderator

The Moderator of the panel discussion, **Mr. Kim Hak-Su, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**, noted that effective monitoring could help determine where stakeholders stand and what they need to achieve. For this, it would be helpful to review existing monitoring and assessment mechanisms for ICT, such as the 23 indicators proposed by the EU. During this discussion, the panelists will discuss various existing benchmarking tools.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Existing e-Strategies by the World Bank

Mr. Pierre Guislain of the World Bank explained the monitoring and evaluation of e-strategies that his organization has initiated. He noted that reviewing existing e-strategies is the key to spreading the benefits of the Information Society.

The World Bank carried out a review of the e-strategies of 14 developing countries. Most strategies failed to include a monitoring and evaluation component. Such a component should include, at a minimum, benchmarks that allow anyone to assess objectively if the e-strategies are being implemented successfully. The lack of such benchmarks makes it more difficult to implement these strategies.

All the e-strategies contained general objectives (usually economic and social) as well as specific objectives (usually related to ICT) and these should be prioritized.

The World Bank pointed out five main problems with the e-strategies reviewed:

1. Specific objectives are too numerous, too vague, and/or not prioritized.
2. Period for implementation may be too short (3 years).
3. Lack of performance indicators and targets, or quantitative indicators that measure the impact of an e-strategy. The strategies should also have qualitative indicators.
4. Lack of benchmarks, which are essential. E-strategies also need a specific mechanism for comparing a country's performance to that of other countries, including a peer review mechanism.
5. Institutional mechanisms: four of 14 had these for their specific objectives, and 5 of 14 for their general objectives. Four of 14 discussed budgetary resources, but none mentioned specific resources for monitoring and evaluation.

New e-strategies should include proper mechanisms for evaluation, monitoring and benchmarks. Countries should be encouraged to use one of the global benchmarking methodologies.

Current World Bank projects in this area include the development of knowledge economy assessment methodologies (similar to the OECD approach), comprised of 4 pillars with 14 indicators as well as indicators comparing countries. In addition, the World Bank had created a network readiness indicator.

In conclusion, Mr. Guislain noted that indicators are a policy tool that can encourage countries to progress in their ICT development. He also commented that the WSIS Plan of Action contained only three specific benchmarks.

ICT Development in the Russian Federation

Mr. Andrey Korotkov, Vice Minister of Telecommunication and Informatization of the Russian Federation, discussed the challenges of ICT development in his country. He explained the geographical difficulties involved, emphasizing the immensity of the Russian Federation, the fact that 48% of the population lives in small towns or in the countryside, and

the obstacles created by harsh climates, such as in Siberia. He then explained the usefulness of new technologies for providing connectivity to these remote areas. Siberia may benefit from satellite connections, and the over 50,000 villages without telephone connectivity could also use new technologies.

Mr. Korotkov highlighted the dichotomy between the availability of new technologies and the capacity to understand and use them. He also pointed to the lack of local and national content on the Internet as a challenge for ICT development in his country.

He listed the five most critical components in ICT development: (1) electricity, (2) connectivity, (3) equipment (personal computers, personal digital assistance - PDAs), (4) content, and (5) the skills to use the equipment (40% of the Russian population has never used the Internet).

In conclusion, he reminded participants of the importance of the physical security of new technological equipment, including the infrastructure. He noted that the lack of such security could seriously hinder ICT development.

Mexico's National e-Strategy

Mr. Pedro Cerisola y Weber, Secretary of State for Communications and Transport of Mexico, noted the importance of developing a strategy for public ICT policy. The Mexican Government seeks to supply access to the Internet to the entire population: first on a community level, and then on an individual level.

To accomplish this, a national system has been created to provide:

1. Connectivity using wideband and high-speed connections, and satellite, wired and wireless access. Mexico launched its first satellite network in June 2003, and has created, through agreements with all levels of government, 3,200 digital community centres. It is hoped that 26,000 more digital community centres, cable TV networks and two more satellites will be created in the next three years.
2. Content: universities and organizations will enable the population to put content on the Internet for e-learning, e-health, e-trade, e-government. Some content is already available in indigenous languages (three pilot cases to date). In addition, the Government is developing new measurement mechanisms to evaluate efforts made, as existing indicators are insufficient. These indicators will be adopted as soon as possible and will help establish better practices and reduce the digital divide.
3. Infrastructure.

Comments from the audience

Croatia

A participant from Croatia explained that her country had already drawn up 19 e-strategies, and that the Government had approved an ICT development strategy in January 2002. To date, some of the problems encountered in implementation are linked to a lack of

standardized benchmarks. The participants suggested that countries should work together to develop these.

Tunisia

A participant from Tunisia proposed that the best way to reduce the digital divide could be through tripartite cooperation between least, medium and most developed countries.

Responses from the Panel

Mr. Guislain of the World Bank agreed that cooperation between countries, especially using peer review mechanisms, is very important, as is the exchange of experiences. He believed that countries can learn not only from their neighbors but also from countries far away.

Mr. Riddle of the Stability Pact noted that there are various levels of economic development in Eastern Europe but that these countries can still work well together because they have the same overall goals.

Mr. Cerisola y Weber of Mexico agreed that learning from other countries could be helpful in learning how to solve certain problems.

Conclusion

Several fundamental components are required to monitor progress. For monitoring, countries must design indicators as universally agreeable tools. International cooperation should be strengthened. The Plan of Action should reflect cultural and linguistic diversity, and the importance of local content. Regional commissions will work closely with regional development banks on joint projects.