



Questions and answers

I. General

What has happened since the World Summits on the Information Society?

The World Summits on the Information Society (WSISs) of 2003 in Geneva and 2005 were the result of an interesting and unique multi-stakeholder process. These WSISs were an opportunity to acknowledge the digital divide and recognise at the global level the urgent need for a strong initiative to mobilise the resources required to reduce the digital divide.

Eight years after the adoption of the Millennium Declaration (and halfway through the timeframe set to achieve its objectives: 2015), and three years after the second phase of the Tunis Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the launch of the Global Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) and the World Digital Solidarity Agency (DSA), an initial stage can be considered to have been completed thanks to the work of the DSF and the DSA at both the political and legal levels, and in supporting and implementing certain projects.

That is only a first phase; now mobilisation is needed at the highest level of global actors in the information society.

What types of projects have been financed and carried out by the DSF and the DSA since 2005?

Born of the strong partnership dynamic of the Geneva and Tunis World Summits on the Information Society (2003 and 2005), the Global Digital Solidarity Fund and the World Digital Solidarity Agency have undertaken numerous actions and engaged in considerable political mobilisation in favour of digital solidarity.

The question of funding is handled by the Global Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF). In the space of 3 years, the DSF has managed to bring together 27 founding members and secure the political backing of 135 countries of the South for the 1% digital solidarity principle (through the support of numerous international organisations: UN, European Union, African Union, NEPAD, Francophony, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Non-Aligned Movement, ACP Group of States).

This principle invites local authorities and businesses that want to take direct action against the digital divide to introduce a digital solidarity clause in their IT and telecoms calls for tenders.

Alongside its funding work, since 2005 the DSF has directly supported 10 pilot projects in Burkina Faso and Burundi, on the themes of health and education.

In close collaboration with Hewlett Packard, the DSF has also begun an e-waste management programme in 4 African countries (South Africa, Kenya, Morocco and Senegal).

Alain Madelin, who was recently elected president of the DSF (6 November 2007), has launched two major projects on telemedicine and e-education.

The World Digital Solidarity Agency (DSA) has developed technical expertise and a methodology for recommendations designed to promote consultation, coordination and coherence between a variety of digital solidarity projects carried out by local authorities.

It has overseen the implementation of 10 digital solidarity projects within the framework of decentralised cooperation, published a technical guide to decentralised cooperation and digital solidarity, and mobilised various networks of town councils and local authorities around these challenges.

The objective of the DSA is to act as a catalyst for projects, avoiding redundancies and unproductive duplication.

Why, despite all the work, action plans and initiatives, is the digital divide continuing to grow?

The initiatives resulting from the WSIS have dissipated or failed to produce the anticipated effects. The majority of actors thought that the technology and the market alone could reduce the digital divide. However, there are numerous divides: cognitive, social, ethnic, geographical, rural, gender, linguistic, etc.

The global explosion of ICTs (USD 2,637 billion in 2006) has seen India and China become, this year, the largest producers of digital goods and services. New digital divides emerge as the benefits of these purely technological advances are largely reaped by the elites of those countries.

Moreover, the main progress made in reducing the digital divide concerns mobile telephony and not access to IT and the Internet.

Finally, the least developed countries remain largely excluded from the benefits of the information society (1% to 2% connectivity).

What are the key factors at play in the fight against the global digital divide?

Numerous studies demonstrate the link between information density and the human development index.

It is widely acknowledged that 1% teledensity generates a 1% increase in GDP.

Therefore, reducing the digital divide is a crucial challenge for the least developed countries, whether at the economic, political, social, educational, health, cultural or human rights level:

At the economic level: access to ICTs is essential to stimulate activity and economic growth in the least developed countries (whether in rural regions or deprived city districts).

At the political level: access to ICTs is necessary to ensure better governance and the full participation of third world countries in globalisation.

At the social level: access to ICTs is necessary to stabilise rural populations (avoid migration, first to cities, then to industrialised countries).

At the educational level: access to ICTs plays an important role in the education of children in deprived areas (principle of equal opportunities).

At the health level: the fight against major pandemics requires better connection of the actors concerned.

At the cultural level: cultural and linguistic diversity will not be possible in globalisation without the support of ICTs.

At the human rights level: nowadays, the right of expression is dependent on access to ICTs.

What is digital solidarity?

The concept of digital solidarity was born of the first multi-stakeholder summits organised by the UN in Geneva and Tunis in 2003 and 2005. It is a concrete response to the digital divide, proposed by President Abdoulaye Wade with the support of several African heads of state (Alpha Oumar Konare, A Bouteflika, O. Obasanjo).

The multi-stakeholder dynamic generated by those summits soon died down after the Tunis summit, due to a lack of effective follow-up on the subject of the digital divide. However, the concept of digital solidarity was given concrete form with the creation of the Global Digital Solidarity Fund (2005) and the World Digital Solidarity Agency (2006).

Digital solidarity aims to reduce the various digital divides through collective work which must bring together the various stakeholders concerned: local authorities, governments, international institutions, the private sector, NGOs, the media, trade unions, and so on.

“Think globally, act locally” is a good maxim for digital solidarity. Digital solidarity actions are conceived through collective work that brings together all the stakeholders concerned by a complex problem. Ultimately, this action takes place at the local level, in town councils and local authorities.

What is the link between the Monterrey process begun in 2002, the Doha conference planned for December 2008 and the Lyon conference of 24 November?

With regard to development issues, 2008 will culminate with the United Nations Summit on financing for development in Doha (from 29 November to 2 December 2008).

One of the issues on the agenda is that of innovative financing mechanisms for development (a French initiative). Throughout 2008 (before the Doha Summit), numerous organisations will take a position on the proposal of the DSF for a voluntary “1% digital solidarity contribution” (African Union, International Organisation of Francophonie, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, Non-Aligned Movement, NEPAD, ACP Group of States, etc.).

The Leading Group on Solidarity Levies to Fund Development (for which France provides the Secretariat) has just approved, at its plenary session in Dakar on 23 April 2008, a draft agreement on the voluntary “1% digital solidarity contribution”.

This agreement is due to be finalised at a second plenary session of the Leading Group in October 2008. Thus, in November 2008, through its work, France could mobilise a broad consensus in favour of the principle of a specific, voluntary contribution to reduce the digital divide. By presenting this initiative in Doha, France will provide a concrete response to one of the most crucial questions for the future of developing countries.

II. Financing digital solidarity

What does the 1% digital solidarity principle consist of and towards whom is it geared?

The financing of the Fund depends on the contributions of its founding members and the support of local authorities, public institutions and businesses that decide to voluntarily apply the 1% digital solidarity contribution, or “Geneva Principle”. This is a contribution of 1% of the total value of public procurement contracts related to information technologies.

Clearly indicated in the call for tenders, as the contribution, which is payable by the successful tenderer, is not subject to negotiation or interpretation, it entails no distortion of competition. This contribution entitles the payer to use the “digital solidarity” label.

Who currently applies it?

According to an in-depth study conducted by the University of Zurich [1], implementation of this principle is compatible with the public procurement law of the European Union. The city councils of Geneva and Lausanne have applied it for 2 years without any particular problems. In addition, some fifteen private companies have contributed to the 1% for digital solidarity (including Hewlett Packard and Sun Microsystems).

This innovative principle is being studied in various countries for possible application on a much wider basis.

III. Digital solidarity and Europe

Why is digital solidarity important to Europe?

While the European Union has a number of policies to promote the development of the least developed countries and promote ICTs, it does not yet have a specific strategy for info-development or, consequently, digital solidarity.

It is also in the interest of Europe (for political, economic, social and cultural reasons), particularly in Africa, to respond to the very high demand among young people for more equitable access to the information society.

Europe has a major economic interest in maintaining a presence in the ICT market in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

Europe is directly concerned by the flow of emigrants from developing countries. By giving the most deprived populations access to ICTs, we provide them with development possibilities on their own soil.

Europe's developing country partners (the ACP states) have called for actions to reduce the digital divide and promote greater digital solidarity (at the ACP Summit of December 2006 in Khartoum). The last Summit appealed directly to Europe to implement the principle of the “1% digital solidarity contribution”.

Other partners of Europe concerned by the digital divide (OIC states, African Union, NAM, Francophone countries, etc.) have agreed to support the global Digital Solidarity Fund proposal for a mechanism dedicated to reducing the digital divide, the “Geneva Principle” or the “1% digital solidarity contribution”.

How is Europe involved in the global thinking process on innovative financing mechanisms for development?

The European countries support the idea of innovative financing mechanisms for development (an initiative launched by Jacques Chirac in January 2004). The mechanism proposed by the global Digital Solidarity Fund to reduce the digital divide is one such mechanism.

Europe has an obvious interest in the Doha Conference (assessment of the 2002 Monterrey Conference) producing satisfactory results.

IV. Digital solidarity, France and the Francophonie

What is the nature of France's involvement in the fight against the digital divide?

For the time being, France is the only developed country to have become a founding member of the Global Digital Solidarity Fund. Two members of the current French government have spoken in favour of the DSF and the innovative mechanism that proposes reducing the digital divide (Michel Barnier and André Santini).

France has created a specific cooperation fund for digital solidarity, supervision of which has been entrusted to the World Digital Solidarity Agency.

By supporting the DSF, France is responding to an initiative that has the solid, unanimous support of all developing countries (and numerous international institutions).

France has played a decisive role in launching the concept of innovative contributions for development.

What is the correlation between the digital divide and the Francophone territories?

The Summit of Francophone Countries (Bucharest Summit in 2006) is the first Summit to have stepped forward to support the Global Digital Solidarity Fund and the principle of a "1% digital solidarity contribution".

"Digital Francophonie" is an important fight in globalisation, when 70% of web content is in English.

Francophone developing countries (particularly in Africa, but also in Asia) are the most affected by the digital divide.

A large part of African immigrants in France come from Francophone countries which are severely handicapped by their lack of Internet access.

In what way can French decentralised cooperation serve as an example of success and good practise in terms of digital solidarity?

Since 2006, the World Digital Solidarity Agency (DSA) has been an exemplary partner for French cooperation on matters of digital solidarity.

Through its strategy of mobilising French decentralised cooperation in favour of digital solidarity, the World Digital Solidarity Agency has been responsible for setting up an expertise and consultation process between local authorities of the North and South.

A handbook that includes the frameworks of international actions, methodological factsheets and the best practices of French local authorities and their partners in the South, has recently been published under the supervision of the DSA and in the publications of the French Directorate-General for Cooperation (DGCID).

How is France involved in the global thinking process on innovative financing mechanisms for development?

France has played a decisive role in the launch of the concept of innovative contributions for development. However, the idea of innovative financing mechanisms is proving slow to take root. The adoption, before the Doha Summit, of an innovative mechanism for development that makes it possible to tackle the crucial matter of the digital divide would constitute a major diplomatic success.

V. Lyon and Rhône-Alpes

What prompted the commitment of Lyon and the Rhône-Alpes Region to digital solidarity?

In parallel with the WSISs, the World Summits of Cities and Local Authorities on the Information Society were organised in Lyon in 2003 and Bilbao in 2005; they explicitly defined the key role of cities and local authorities in the fight against the digital divide.

They demonstrated the importance of the local level in implementing digital solidarity strategies. Acting at the local level makes it possible to meet the precise needs of populations and build projects in close collaboration with all the actors in a given territory: public sector, universities, NGOs, local institutions, private sector, local media, etc.

Consequently, the president of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade, made the trip to attend the Lyon Summit in person in order to request the support of local authorities for digital solidarity, by stressing the fact that in a global context that increasingly favours decentralisation, only the local level could make it possible to achieve effective coordination of the actions of the various partners of local authorities.

All these summits have helped states and local authorities focus on the need for structures and resources that support local authorities and their partners with the financing of projects and facilitate consultation between the different stakeholders.

VI. The Lyon conference of 24 November

In what context has the Lyon conference come about?

Upstream, the WSISs and the World Summits of Cities and Local Authorities
Downstream, the Monterrey process and the forthcoming Doha Conference on Financing for Development (29 November to 2 December 2008)

Why was Lyon chosen to host this conference?

The Rhône-Alpes Regional Authority and Greater Lyon Council have been pioneers in advocating and taking concrete action for digital solidarity. They are at the heart of a global process which was launched politically in Lyon 5 years ago, at the World Summit of Cities and Local Authorities on the Information Society that they organised together.

Moreover, the Urban Community of Lyon was behind the creation of the World Digital Solidarity Agency, which it is currently presiding over and supporting during its launch phase.

Finally, the Rhône-Alpes Region and Lyon are two important European local authorities that have long been involved in decentralised cooperation, which is an effective framework for development.

What objectives and results are expected from this conference?

The Lyon Conference hopes to demonstrate:

- That digital technology **is a development tool with considerable leverage**, as much as – and indeed more than – a problem to be solved;
- That it is not only a question of financing infrastructures, but also **catalysing partnerships** around specific, socially useful projects;

That this field is particularly conducive to **experimenting with innovative financing mechanisms and partnership arrangements** that bring together governments, local authorities, the private sector, civil society and international organisations.

Its main objectives will be to:

Prioritise, promote and finance a series of high-added-value development projects on telemedicine, digital education and the recycling of computers;

Find ad-hoc financing for digital solidarity, particularly by encouraging local authorities to try the 1% digital solidarity contribution and obtaining the backing of funding agencies for projects;

Set up a permanent structure to catalyse innovative projects that can be financed by international funding agencies (idea of launching a global digital solidarity forum, to be organised by the DSF and the DSA).

What lasting benefits will this initiative generate for the fight against the digital divide?

In a rapidly evolving global context, the Lyon Conference will be the starting point for a new multi-stakeholder dynamic on digital solidarity. It will be an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of these challenges and involve new partners, particularly European partners, in this innovative initiative.

What will happen between now and the Lyon conference? How is its preparation being organised?

A conference ambassador will be appointed by the French government and will coordinate the international working group; the DSF and DSA will be responsible for implementing the conference programme and ensuring its success in terms of results.

A series of interim conferences held between now and 24 November will contribute to the results of the Lyon conference.

[1] *Rolf H Weber/Valérie Menoud, The Information Society and the Digital Divide - Legal Strategies to Finance Global Access, Zurich/Basel/Geneva 2008. Rolf H Weber/Valérie Menoud, The Digital Solidarity Clause - An Analysis in the Light of Contract, Public Procurement, and Competition Law, in: Gauch/Werro/Pichonnaz (eds.), Mélanges en l'honneur de Pierre Tercier à l'occasion de son 65ème anniversaire, Zurich/Basel/Geneva 2008, pp. 471-494.*