



Editorial

As of this year, 17 May has been declared World Information Day by the United Nations. This decision highlights the need for new forms of solidarity to enable us to build a more equitable information society. And at the same time it serves as a reminder that the great majority of mankind is still excluded from the knowledge society.

Only 15 to 20% of the world population has access to knowledge, while the information society claims to promote universal participation in globalization. This is tantamount to brushing aside a major part of the knowledge gathered by humankind!

Urgent measures need to be put in place to end this social, cultural and economic injustice, especially since the Millennium Goals cannot be attained without the information and communication technologies (ICT). The creation of the DSF is the first step by the international community on the road to digital solidarity. The second step will be an international conference on digital solidarity financing, which should be held in the coming months. Only an agreement between States, with the participation of enterprises, local collectivities and civil society, can allow us to take up this challenge. This is the spirit of «private-public partnership» (ppp) which the Fund sees as necessary if we are to bridge the digital divide.

We take the opportunity of this special number of our Newsletter to express our heartiest congratulations to President Abdoulaye Wade and to Professor Muhammad Yunus for their commitment to digital solidarity. As Kofi Annan recently stated, it takes a certain political courage to undertake financing for development. Here are two personalities who belong to the category of leaders of which the world has a real need.

Alain Clerc, Executive Secretary

President A. Wade of Senegal receives the first Information Society Award

On the occasion of the World Information Society Day, President Wade highlights the need to hold an international conference on digital solidarity financing



President A. Wade presents his vision of digital solidarity before the WSIS in Geneva, 2003, which made possible the creation of the DSF.

Mr President, what does this award of the information society mean to you?

It is not so much a matter of receiving the award as the acknowledgement by the international community of the 17th of May as «International Information Society Day». In so doing, States accept that we are entering a new era, the era of the information society. In presenting me with this award, the United Nations testify to their demand for a new international solidarity.

This is an essential point, because it is impossible to envisage the information society unless we close the chasm that has existed between the North and the South in particular over the past decades.

Does the DSF, founded by yourself, benefit from widespread support on the part of the international community?

The decisions adopted unanimously by the United Nations demonstrate that today the Fund is recognized throughout the international community. This success is in large measure due to those responsible for the Fund, and as such I associate them with this award. Now we need to establish the Fund and its innovative financial mechanism firmly in international law (one percent digital solidarity contribution paid on transactions for ICT related products or services). This is the challenge we face in the coming months. The Fund is a new initiative and like any new idea, it will be called into question by all those who fear change.



WSIS, Tunis, 16 November 2005.

How can we finance the fight against the digital divide?

In January 2004 in Geneva, Presidents Chirac, Lula and Lagos, with the support of the United Nations Secretary General, launched an appeal in favour of the development of new financial mechanisms to meet the Millennium Goals. On proposal by 77 States, the United Nations endorsed the appeal by Presidents Chirac, Lula and Lagos last year in New York. We can thus count on support for our initiative of one percent for digital solidarity, although of course other sources of financing are also possible.

The reduction of the digital divide that President Mandela was already demanding in the nineteen-nineties is a determining factor for the future of the developing countries. The de facto exclusion of these States from globalization, by the present refusal to permit them access to knowledge and know-how, is unacceptable. To withhold access to information technology from 80 percent of the world's population is tantamount to denying their cultural, economic and political existence. Clearly this is not the world that we are looking towards at the start of the 21st century.

What responsibility do countries carry that have access to ICT, for example the industrialized countries?

An enormous one, insofar as at present they are the main beneficiaries of the information society's advantages and are the best placed to appreciate those advantages. But I must stress that we are not only talking about

States: all the political and economic actors of the North are concerned. By opening up to the local collectivities, enterprises and to civil society, hand in hand with the State authorities, the DSF is establishing a basis for new worldwide solidarity.

Are you supporting the idea of an international conference on digital solidarity financing?

This is an essential phase in the Fund's development. Projects require resources equal to the matter at stake, estimated at several billions Euros. The conference needs to adopt an international agreement which among other things will establish the modalities for financing an information society conscious of the need for solidarity.

What message would you like to send to the enterprises of the digital sector?

Engagement by the private sector is vital. The Fund expects an unambiguous commitment on the part of enterprises. It is in their direct interest that the Fund should invest in markets that at present are insolvent. The one percent for digital solidarity is not a tax but an investment on the part of enterprises that opens up new markets for them. So it is good that they should participate in the Fund to achieve this

objective. What is more, the enterprises called upon will be the primary beneficiaries of the Fund's purchases. As such, the process offers them twofold gain especially as they are closely involved in the Fund's resource management. The Fund indeed illustrates the «ppp» concept (public-private partnership) promoted by the World Economic Forum, the Global Compact and the United Nations.

Is there a place for decentralized cooperation in the development of the Fund?

The involvement of local collectivities in the DSF is one of the strong points of the process. We will never solve the problems of development without a determined commitment by local collectivities to a policy of cooperation. The Millennium Goals require such a commitment. This is particularly true in respect of new information technologies. Local collectivities have basic experience which they need to share. This is the quintessence of the information and communication society. It is thus important for all local collectivities to commit in favour of the one percent digital solidarity principle, by including it in all their calls for bids for ICT related products or services. The City of Dakar and the City of Geneva have been the first to take the step. In so doing they demonstrate that solidarity is not only a matter of words, but that it works in the best interest of all. This example needs to be followed all over the world.

«We will never solve the problems of development without a determined commitment by local collectivities to a policy of cooperation»



President A. Wade and ITU Secretary General Y. Utsumi, at the WSIS round table, «Connect the World», Tunis, 16 November 2005.



17 May, World Information Society day

ITU Secretary-General Mr Yoshio Utsumi explains why it is urgent to raise awareness of the importance of ICT for developing countries

How is this World Information Society day important within the goal to bridge the digital divide?

World Information Society Day marks a global recognition of an emerging people-centred and development-oriented Information Society that aims to close the chasm separating those who have access to information and knowledge and those who are denied the benefits of the digital revolution. Connecting the unconnected and empowering people to achieve their development goals by harnessing the full potential of information and communication technologies is one of the main objectives endorsed by the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis. They called upon the United Nations to declare 17 May, which commemorates World Telecommunication Day, as World Information Society Day to raise awareness of the importance of ICT that can bring enormous possibilities to societies and economies.

What would you recommend as the best use of technological and scientific advancement to bridge the digital divide?

To seize the development dividend of technological advances, action must be taken for the creation of knowledge, sharing of information and best practices. Tools must be developed as well as capacity building in order to adapt to the ever-changing ICT technologies, and the fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships. Developing countries need to formulate policies to foster an enabling environment conducive to private investment. At the same time, public policies aimed at traditional societal needs must be developed keeping in mind the facilitating role that ICT can play in these fields.

What would be your assessment of the DSF as a global organization to fight the digital divide?

The Digital Solidarity Fund has been welcomed by world leaders at the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva 2003 – Tunis 2005) and



In the words of Mr Yoshio Utsumi, the ITU Secretary General, the objective is to connect the unconnected and empower people to achieve their development goals.

at the 2005 Millennium Summit in New York. It is widely recognized as an innovative financial mechanism of a voluntary nature open to interested stakeholders with the objective of transforming the digital divide into digital opportunities for the developing world. By harnessing local resources and looking at the difficulties afflicting poor and remote communities, the Fund's work is complementary to that of major financial institutions and multilateral development agencies.

Backed by the goodwill of all, it has the potential to develop into a global organization that will help close the digital divide.

President Wade of Senegal and Professor Muhammad Yunus receive the World Information Society Award. What has motivated this choice?

The ITU World Information Society Award is being presented to two towering personalities for their contribution towards building a global Information Society for the benefit of all.

I take pleasure in congratulating His Excellency President Abdoulaye Wade of

Senegal for his vision and dedication in promoting the digital solidarity agenda that led to the creation of the Digital Solidarity Fund. His proposal, which emphasized the potential of information and communication technologies in achieving development, triggered

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meaningful dialogue during the WSIS and represents one of the major pillars for building a more inclusive and equitable Information Society.

The Award also goes to another legendary figure, Professor Muhammad Yunus, Managing Director of Grameen Bank. I take this opportunity to congratulate Professor Yunus, who pioneered micro-credit for the rural poor and who has successfully addressed the issues of poverty eradication and development by providing wireless payphone service in the rural areas of Bangladesh run by a new class of women entrepreneurs. Professor Yunus has single-handedly transformed the information and communication landscape in Bangladesh, while this exemplary model is now being emulated in other regions and countries of the world.

Upcoming challenges facing the Fund

To mark the presentation of the World Information Society Award to the originator of the DSF, the Fund's president, Guy-Olivier Segond, takes stock of past achievements and future challenges

The DSF held its first Foundation Board meeting on 20 March 2006. Where do matters stand at this point?

During the early months of its existence, the Fund has found good general acceptance of a one percent digital solidarity contribution on local collectivities' public procurement in the field of information technology. In concrete terms, the Secretariat is now concentrating on consolidating its structure. All the while it has been fine-tuning the modalities for financing the Fund and its activities, before enlisting broad political support in the international community. This is now substantiated by the financing of the first projects in Africa and Asia.

What are the challenges in the medium term?

Contributing to digital solidarity can give rise to legal problems in some countries on account of the local collectivities' statutes. To overcome these, we need to conclude an international treaty by virtue of which the signatory States authorize local collectivities to make the contribution. International discussions on new mechanisms of financing for development are now under way, with the participation of the Fund.

Is the private sector happy with the «one percent digital solidarity» principle?

The decision to apply the contribution is made by the local collectivities, but it is important that private enterprise should appreciate how the system works: clearly stated in the calls for bids, the contribution is collected in the information technology sector to finance insolvable demand, being subject to neither interpretation nor negotiation. It is neither a tax nor a gift, but an investment in future markets giving entitlement to the «digital solidarity» label.

Senegal President H.E. A. Wade has received the World Information Society Award for his initiative to create the DSF. What does this award mean to you?

The Award acknowledges the importance of President A. Wade's action. As the bearer of the African Union's initiative to transform the digital divide into digital solidarity, he formulated a vision and a project which he presented to the international community. The Fund is thus pleased and proud that the action of its Founding Father should be acknowledged in this way by the first World Information Society Award. ■



Pr. Yunus with a beneficiary of the «Village Phone» programme.

Muhammad Yunus receives the World Information Society Award

Professor Muhammad Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank¹, has been acclaimed by the ITU for his action within the poorest local communities. In 1997 he set up the «Village Phone» programme to provide outlying rural regions with access to telephone services. Operated by GrameenPhone with the support of Grameen Bank, «Village Voice» aims to install a telephone in every village and thus contribute to their economic development. The principle is to enable women to operate a public wireless payphone office. Through the programme, they can subscribe to a loan to invest in a telephone subscription and a mobile phone. They then offer the telephone service to the people of the village for a small charge. To date, some 165,000 people have joined the Village Phone programme, which provides access to a telephone to more than 60 millions people dwelling in rural Bangladesh.

Source : www.grameenphone.com

¹ The Grameen Bank was founded in Bangladesh by Muhammad Yunus in 1983, with the objective of offering micro-credits to the poorest members of the community.



M. Benaïssa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Morocco, and G.-O. Segond at the DSF inauguration ceremony on 15 April 2005. Behind, the DSF Vice-President A. Top and the Executive Secretary A. Clerc.



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