

**Sixty-seventh Session of the General Assembly  
Joint Informal Meeting of Second and Third Committees**

**Communication for Development: Using ICT and Broadband to  
Accelerate Social and Economic Development  
12 November 2012, 3:00 – 6:00 p.m.  
ECOSOC Chamber, NLB**

**Introduction:**

H.E. Mr. George Wilfred Talbot, Permanent Representative of Guyana to the UN, and Chair of the General Assembly's Second Committee, welcomed Member States and guests to this Joint Informal Meeting. He stated that ICTs play a large role in economic development and are a growing sector for employment. A current focus for the Second Committee is on increasing access to broadband services and reducing the digital divide.

H.E. Mr. Henry L. Mac-Donald, Permanent Representative of Suriname to the UN, and Chair of the General Assembly's Third Committee noted that cell phones and the Internet had already made a positive impact on more than a billion people alive today. He stressed the importance of focusing on women and girls with respect to mobile telephony and Broadband, noting that the male/female employment ratio in the IT sector was particularly sharp at the higher levels of management. Further, he noted that world leaders would gather in 2015 for the 10th anniversary of the first World Summit on the Information Society, at which they would assess progress and look ahead to ensuring sustainable use of world's resources, the use of cell phones and the Internet. He stated that the world had "reached the breaking point" in terms of achieving sustainable economic and social development for the world community, suggesting that one cause of this was the failure to reach MDG 3 (gender equality and empowerment of women) in a timely manner.

During his introductory remarks, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Martin Mogwanja noted that the development playing field was not level. He further suggested that access to and the quality and utilization of essential public goods and services were inadequate for millions of children. In many countries, girls, refugee children, indigenous populations, minorities, internally displaced or migrant children, children with disabilities or those living with chronic diseases, as well as children in crowded inner-city neighbourhoods and in isolated rural areas, were unable to benefit fully from national development. Communication for development (C4D) could play a significant role in enhancing access and utilization of public goods and services for all children, especially in marginalized communities. Mr. Mogwanja cited several examples how UNICEF has used C4D to advance the rights of children and contribute toward their well-being and development.

Mr. Mogwanja also challenged Member States to:

1. Promote open policy dialogue and enhanced cooperation to increase and improve access to and use of ICTs among the most marginalized groups, including in schools and health centres, thereby tapping the potential of the entire national population to contribute to community resilience and sustainable development;
2. Create enabling frameworks, policies and monitoring mechanisms to support C4D strategies and programmes that tap into the power of ICTs to strengthen programmes at local and national levels, ensuring multi-stakeholder dialogue and free and fair access to information and knowledge resources;
3. Identify and support partnerships between the ICT-oriented private sector and national governments to create together an enabling environment for equitable digital access and equal participation of all groups in national development, with particular attention to education and employment opportunities for girls and women, the disabled, indigenous peoples and minorities.

A video, “U-report in Uganda: Technology for Development”, was shown, demonstrating how the texting function on cell phones, a component of a broader C4D intervention that included the use of other communication channels and processes, was being employed to solicit and hear the voices of young people on key issues affecting their lives and those of their families.<sup>1</sup>

The Chairperson of the Second Committee introduced the moderator of the panel, Mr. Rafael Obregon, Chief, Communication for Development, UNICEF. Mr. Obregon introduced the panelists and addressed a question to prompt their responses for discussion.

### **Panelists:**

Ms. Jasna Matic, Special Advisor for Competitiveness and Knowledge Economy, Minister of Finance and Economy, Serbia, said that while ICTs influenced contemporary life in every way, women were not using ICT as avidly as men. In many regions, women faced challenges in owning ICT equipment, including cell phones. She noted that IT was a good sector for employment, especially for women, as it was well paid, had good duration, and generally offered good working conditions and possibilities for working from home. To that end, ITU and Serbia had introduced the new “Girls in ICT Day”, which was celebrated for the first time in 2012, to promote a career in ICTs for women and girls. She stated that, in most industrialized countries, most “apps” were used by cell phone users for free time or leisure activities, whereas in developing countries, apps were used for easing real-life problems. This was one reason why banking apps were developed in less developed countries, such as Kenya. While big international banks might be less interested in the small depositors, at a national level, banks were able to address individual issues whilst also promoting their own interests. Ms. Matic also noted that women tended to use ICTs for the benefit of their families and communities and that the costs of a cell phone or computer, with Internet access, were often prohibitive for women.

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<sup>1</sup> Produced by UNICEF.

Ms. Alethea Clark-Lodge, Programme Manager, Public Private Partnerships, Microsoft, stated that Information Technology (IT) was crucial to empowering women. IT could help reduce the isolation felt by many women in both rural and urban settings. ICTs also had a role in human rights and in reducing labour burdens. Yet, even though ICTs touched almost every aspect of our lives, women were still under-represented in science and technology in secondary and tertiary education. They were also less than 30 per cent of the overall IT workforce. According to the ITU, she stated, in 2011, 70% of households in industrialized countries and 30% in developing countries had full access to ICTs, reflecting a continuing digital divide across the globe. Challenges facing women with respect to ICTs included lack of computer and cell phone literacy; language barriers (English being the predominant language in IT); lack of mobility by women, who were often restricted to their homes or neighbourhoods; location of IT facilities, which may be far from their homes; the cost of ICTs; limited infrastructure; and interconnectivity being limited to major cities. She called for governments to be more in tune with the ICT needs of women. Ms. Clark-Lodge also suggested that ICT-focused summer camps for girls could be supported (for example, Digi-girlz, which introduced girls as young as 10 years old to ICTs); cybercafés and telecentres could be opened in areas of high demand among women and youth. She concluded her statement with comments about the important role of public-private partnerships (PPP), citing examples from Kahawatu in Burundi, which was supported by Mitsubishi.

Mr. Darrell E. Owen, Senior ICT Consultant, US Agency for International Development, opened his comments with a description of USAID's Leland Initiative during the 1990s, which focused on introducing the Internet into about 20 African countries. This Initiative had targeted the country-to-country aspect of the "Digital Divide," and focused on the Internet.

During the beginning of the decade, USAID undertook the "Last Mile Initiative", focusing on the urban-to-rural aspect of the "Digital Divide," the so-called "last mile" of access. He cited examples in Macedonia, where a nationwide broadband wireless network had been established; in Vietnam, where a project worked to operationalize the country's universal service fund (USF); and in Mongolia, where sustainable low-cost and sustainable telecommunication services had been introduced to four small rural communities. In 2010, USAID had launched a "Global Broadband and Innovation" or "GBI" program. Mr. Owen emphasized that countries should develop well thought-out National Broadband Strategies, perhaps requiring cell phone carriers to build a tower-to-tower "backbone" to handle traffic. This required a collective national approach with broadband increasingly viewed within the context of socioeconomic development that could feed a larger national development agenda. He urged governments with universal service funds in place to move from a subsidy model that focused on voice to a seed capital model that focused on building a national broadband network. For while a national broadband networks were important, distribution to users was increasingly being accomplished through wireless. In practice, this was resulting in quicker access and less expense, and it also had the potential for greater reach. For example, there was a major shift underway in the mobile environment, from larger macro cells to small cells that could be powered by clean energy such as solar, wind, pico-hydro, and biofuels.

Mr. Owen stated that a promising option for extending broadband had come from the migration of TV broadcasting from analog to digital. This was freeing up sub-1GigaHertz frequencies that could reach longer distances. It would also ensure that more frequencies were available for

wireless broadband, which could have a 10 kilometer radius from a single access point. He urged Member States to nurture innovative and locally-relevant uses of broadband, such as mMoney, mHealth, mEducation and mAgriculture applications. He agreed with Ms. Clark-Lodge's comment regarding the Internet's predominance of English-only content and noted that today's technologies present a tremendous opportunity to link issues of access and use by women and girls to ICTs and development.

Mr. Luis Fernando Lozano, Director, Compartel, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Colombia, noted that his country had developed its first social inclusion policy in 1998. At the time, 17,000 localities did not have access to the Internet or to mobile phones. The policy had made significant strides towards universal service, and today more than 10,000 telephone systems had been installed, including in indigenous and most marginalized communities. Since 2004, the national social inclusion project has provided fibre optics for 1,078 communities out of 1,200 that had been without Internet access. In these, community centres had been set up for wider access and reach. Access had enhanced quality of life for all Colombians, bringing possibilities for public participation, access to national discourses and opportunities for education. With 45,000 educational institutions nationally, 50% of schools were now connected to the Internet. Mr. Lozano noted that an "ecosystem for technologies" was being developed, in which children would return to schools after hours to teach their parents how to use the Internet. This was helping create a demand-based model, not an initiative pushed only from the capital. He also emphasised the importance of involving multiple players, including the private sector. This public-private model had enabled 800 of the poorest communities to have a "digital live point".

### **Lead Discussants:**

Mr. Gary Fowlie, Head, ITU Liaison Office to the United Nations, congratulated the Second and Third Committees for meeting on this issue, noting that ICTs had, *inter alia*, contributed to fulfilling human rights as a cross-cutting and enabling tool. He noted that this field needed greater participation of and by girls and women for many reasons, the most important being that women drove social and economic growth. Projections indicated that over two million ICT jobs would be created in the coming decade, with a shortfall of one million qualified individuals to fill them. He urged Member States to overcome the societal constructs that had "labeled ICT careers for women as boring, difficult or inappropriate". He reinforced the messages from the panelists highlighting that girls must be empowered; women must have full and equal access to ICTs; girls must have the same educational opportunities, digital literacy and linguistic diversity as boys; employment in the IT sector should encourage parity for women; and public-private partnerships should be encouraged.

Mr. Fowlie noted that the Broadband Commission has established four targets:

1. *Making broadband policy universal.* By 2015, all countries should have a national broadband strategy or include broadband in their Universal Access/Service Definitions;

2. *Making broadband affordable.* By 2015, entry-level broadband services should be made affordable in developing countries;
3. *Connecting homes to broadband.* By 2015, 40% of households in developing countries should have internet access;
4. *Getting people online.* By 2015, Internet users' penetration should reach 60% worldwide, 50% in developing countries and 15% in LDCs.

The Broadband Commission had created a Working Group on Gender in September 2012. Chaired by Helen Clark, Administrator of UNDP, the Working Group had received a \$1 million contribution to support bringing girls into the IT sector.

Ms. Suzanne Bilello, Senior Public Information and Liaison Officer, UNESCO, noted the importance of ensuring that ICTs become part of all educational curricula and that educators themselves be trained to teach students how to use ICTs. Ms. Bilello encouraged more distance-learning and mobile learning and noted the support provided by UNESCO to national ICT policy development, with the NGO Commonwealth of Learning. She emphasized the role of ICTs in the applied sciences, especially for use by populations with respect to climate change. To that end, UNESCO was working on specific policy guidelines on ICTs and climate change for use in academic institutions. She reiterated the call for more multilingualism and, in that connection, noted that UNESCO had been working together with Microsoft in developing a policy on provision of Internet content in local languages. Ms. Bilello concluded her remarks with a timeline leading to the 10th anniversary of the World Summit on the Information Society, which will be led by ITU in 2015.

Mr. Vladimir Cuk, Head, New York Secretariat of the International Disability Alliance, stated that ICTs were vital for making participation possible for persons with disabilities (PWD) worldwide. Accessibility could mean many things, and, for persons with disabilities, accessibility meant ensuring functional access to ICTs. When technologies and services were not accessible, they represented one more barrier to participation. For example, blind people were concerned about digital TV, as some content did not have a text-to-speech component, subtitling, etc. He noted that the cost of technology still often remained prohibitive for PWD. Likewise, people with cognitive disabilities found the Internet complex to navigate. He urged consultation with PWD to ensure that technology devices, services and networks were designed, from the beginning, to be accessible. Mr. Cuk referenced the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as an important tool for Member States to observe, and he invited Member States to include people with disabilities in the development of ICT-related policies. In conclusion, he noted that PWD had been particularly excluded from the MDG process and expressed the hope that they would be included far more extensively in the elaboration of the post-2015 agenda.

## **Member States:**

The representative from Suriname congratulated the Chairs of the Second and Third Committees for organizing the meeting, suggesting that in the future many other issues—such as migration, the MDGs and food security—could fruitfully be examined and discussed jointly by both Committees. He was particularly interested in the investment aspects of ICTs and asked whether the universal services funds were entirely funded by the government. He also asked for the status of the Broadband Commission's targets.

The representative of Tanzania noted the country's slow progress with respect to ICTs, but commented that, where public-private partnerships had been established, solid results had begun to be seen. For example, fibre optics cover almost three-fourths of the national territory, and within two years, the entire country would be covered. He also noted that now, even the poorest farmer could ascertain crop prices, paying just three cents rather than the three dollars charged prior to the installation of the IT backbone. With respect to language, he said Kiswahili was now being used throughout East Africa. He also acknowledged the need to provide accessible ICTs for persons with disability.

The representative of Israel commented that she had been fascinated to hear that content from developed countries was primarily aimed at leisure activities while in developing countries it was necessity that drives innovation. She wondered about the feasibility of creating something that would connect the two, bringing content for the benefit of all. The representative said that women and men were different, and the main strength of women was communication. Maybe women's contribution to ICTs should be as communicators, the networking part, which would be one way for women to take on a serious role. She requested clarification about public-private partnerships and about the prospects for i-professionals, working from home.

The representative of Morocco said that ICTs served as instruments of rapprochement, as had been seen in the Middle East over the past two years. Efforts to provide access to ICTs should be accompanied by provision of access to basic services such as health, education and work. He asked how the UN system could link access to ICTs with efforts aimed at achieving the MDGs.

The representative of Switzerland thanked the Committee Chairs, panelists and discussants, especially for comments specific to human rights. The issue of gender in ICT access and use was vital, but, as it could possibly lead to a tightening of controls, it was important that citizens were involved in deciding which uses were good for them and participated fully in shaping the online world. The rights to freedom of expression and association must be observed for the online platforms.

## **Responses:**

Ms. Matic responded to the representative of Tanzania by saying that ICTs provided a plethora of opportunities for changing lives. For example, apps were resolving real-life issues. Overall,

large banks were not as able or willing to modify their large-scale business models to accommodate \$3 disposable income, whereas telephone companies were interested, so entirely new business models were being created. Responding to the representative of Israel, she agreed that women were very capable as communicators but also needed to be aware of the technical aspects as well. They also needed to know how to make communication happen on digital platforms. She said that ICTs brought more democracy and speech than traditional media. This new form of media was changing traditional stereotypes and bringing a symmetry that had not existed before. Today, uploads and downloads were of equal magnitude, and people were producing their own content.

Ms. Clark-Lodge agreed that careers in IT required long hours and sometimes involved issues of personal security (for example, the safety of women who worked evening hours and therefore required special transportation). She suggested that it was this, in part, that might be responsible for fewer women being in the classroom to learn about ICTs. Initiatives such as UN Women's Safe Cities Initiative were addressing such concerns with success.

Mr. Owens described the universal service fund mechanism in more detail. He underscored that many countries had collected more funds than they had distributed. For example, a survey by ITU of 25 African countries showed that \$468 million had been collected by 2010, with only \$68 million distributed. He noted the tendency to collect and retain the funds in reserve, specifically emphasizing that this was not necessarily an indication of corruption. These countries could leverage the Universal Service Funds better. For example, most Universal Service Funds were built around subsidies for voice, but mobile telephony increasing uses of texting could be used to that end. In Kenya, which did not have a USF, USAID had provided support, with the result that the government realized that a national broadband strategy was critical, and that strategy was now feeding the social and economic development of the country. Indonesia had a large reserve in its USF that could be leveraged for national development. A similar situation existed in Viet Nam, suggesting that activating the USFs remained challenging for some countries. Colombia had taken \$168 million for the USF annually and was leveraging many more millions from the private sector. In Tanzania, USAID would examine the broadband backbone in rural parts of the country to explore possibilities for going off the electricity grid.

Mr. Lozano agreed with the representative of Morocco that ICT access could improve educational outcomes. He re-emphasized the need for private sector involvement.

The representative from the Food and Agriculture Organization noted that satellite communication had been used for 30 years and had changed all aspects of agriculture and rural development. As women were the food producers in many developing countries, their access to ICTs was critical. FAO was working with research and extension branches of national governments and academic institutions, along with Member States and UN agencies, to ensure that the latest technologies were reaching the most remote communities.

The representative of Liberia acknowledged the under-representation of women and girls in science and technology. She realized that there seemed to be a fear about having girls involved in science and learning it. Given this, it was important that sensitizing girls about ICTs needed to start at early age. She noted that Colombia's experience was inspiring but also faced many challenges. For Liberia, even ensuring that the capital city had electricity has been difficult. She

requested more information on the low-cost technologies mentioned by Mr. Owen, particularly for rural areas.

### **Conclusion:**

In final comments, the panelists responded to Member States' remarks. Ms. Matic said that the ICT sector was developing so rapidly that other sectors were lagging behind. Ms. Clark-Lodge said the Microsoft Research Group was putting together a description of best practices, including Digital Green from India, which had now moved to Africa. She said that some agricultural examples would be collated and shared. She also agreed with the representative of Liberia that children as young as three years old should be encouraged to use ICTs, noting that in a recent talk with the US-based Sesame Workshop there was discussion about developing more content on portable devices for children.

Mr. Owen acknowledged that technical terminology could be intimidating, but underlined that the concepts involved were simple. Small cell technology was inexpensive: what used to cost \$250,000 could now be built for \$30,000, and solar energy could now power the towers. He noted that much wasted energy could be put to use in small communities. He said that white space, which was a series of frequencies not being used, could be put to better use. Wi-fi could also be made available to everyone, with only a small tower being required every few kilometres.

Mr. Lozano noted ICTs were yielding at least three results in Colombia: a 10-15% decline in the number of drop-outs from primary school was being seen where children had access to ICTs in the classroom; there was increased cohesion in family units; and more community spaces were being created around ICTs.

The moderator thanked the panelists and Member States. He said that the discussion had reaffirmed the importance of broadband and ICTs in advancing social and economic development. However, access was not enough; an enabling environment for women and girls was also needed. A comprehensive and inclusive approach was needed at global and national levels to ensure that all marginalized groups had access to and were using ICTs. He noted that the role of public-private partnerships had clearly emerged as important. Particularly as C4D utilized a broader range of communication processes and tools that facilitate engagement and participation of women, children and communities in various aspects of their environment, ICTs were becoming important tools to attain children's rights. He affirmed that C4D offered tremendous opportunities to work with Member States, communities and civil society.

The Chairperson of the Third Committee thanked everyone for the rich discussion that had taken place on this crucial question in the course of the Joint Informal Meeting. He summarized the key points that he had heard throughout the session as follows:

1. Content and connectivity go hand in hand;
2. Importance of public-private partnerships. More PPPs need to be identified and acknowledged;



3. Women and girls should be included in the ICT industry, especially with respect to communication;
4. Governments should pay attention to women and girls in their policy- and legislation-making;
5. Open policy dialogue and enhanced participation by marginalized groups needed to be promoted by the UN system and Member States;
6. With the costs of technology still quite high, more needed to be done to ensure that PWD and people in rural areas are able to use ICTs;
7. Funds provided to develop ICTs should be used accordingly.

The Chairs of the Second and Third Committee thanked the panelists, the moderator, and the Secretariat for their contributions to this event. They also thanked UNICEF for the important behind-the-scenes role it had played in bringing this event to a successful conclusion, noting that critical progress had been made in the cross-fertilization of substantive issues across the two Committees.

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