The Istanbul Action Plan

Awareness, Accessibility and Affordability singled out as key factors in bridging the digital divide

The multi-pronged Istanbul Action Plan adopted by the Conference underlines the leading role which ITU can play in bridging the digital divide with its inclusive membership base of 189 Member States and nearly 670 Sector Members from the private sector, public organizations and regional and international organizations. Throughout the Conference, delegations stressed the need to:

● Develop larger scale partnerships (public-private, public-public and South-South) to better implement strategies for ICT development.

● Enhance cooperation, particularly with regional organizations and the private sector, and reinforce and support regional initiatives for ICT development, such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Connectivity Agenda for the Americas region and the Tokyo Declaration of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity Summit on the Information Society.

● Increase available resources for telecommunication development and direct a greater share to least developed countries through aggressive resource mobilization.

The Istanbul Action Plan consists of:

● Six programmes focusing on regulatory reform, new technologies, E-strategies and applications, economics and finance, human capacity building and special assistance to the least developed countries (see pages 19–20).

● Two cross-cutting activities to support the six programmes. These activities focus on statistics and analysis of telecommunication and ICT development.

● Special initiatives on private sector as well as on gender, youth and indigenous people.

● Action to be taken by ITU Members including world and regional telecommunication development conferences, regional evaluation meetings, and the work of experts within the scope of Study Group activities.

The Istanbul Declaration

The Istanbul Declaration enshrines a shared vision of the future development of telecommunications worldwide. It highlights the fact that the reduction of the digital divide will not only bring opportunities to countries but will also create the conditions to derive benefits from the implementation of new services and applications. It stresses that "the emergence of a conducive environment and entrepreneurial approaches to providing a rural service and more cost-effective technologies, may provide an opportunity for more rapid deployment of telecommunication services in rural and remote areas". It also underlines the fact that community access to ICTs is one of the most cost-effective ways of achieving universal access in many developing countries. The Declaration urges all stakeholders to make their contribution to extend the benefits of ICTs to all the world's inhabitants. Governments are urged to establish an enabling environment that promotes reasonable and affordable access to basic telecommunication services for all.

The difficulty lies not in new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones…

In his closing remarks, Mr Touré told delegates that the commitment made at Istanbul was the beginning of a new era. Quoting Lord Keynes, he said: "The difficulty lies not in new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones." He went on to add that the time was ripe to escape from old ideas and to focus not on the digital divide but on digital opportunities. "The digital age represents a new frontier of human accomplishment and its locus should reside in all countries. Let the conclusions of this Conference truly mark the birth of the 'digital' baby. If we all commit ourselves to these conclusions, the low teledensities in least and developing

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Hamadoun I. Touré, BDT Director

(ITU 020041)

countries can be doubled or even tripled before our next World Telecommunication Development Conference, Internet penetration will reach at least 25 per cent of the population and every school will be wired or unwired, making information accessible to every child in the world."

WTDC-02 Chairman receives the ITU Gold medal

As the first person to have chaired two major ITU world conferences, the Chairman of the Conference, Fatih Mehmet Yurdal became the first to receive a gold medal from the ITU. "The digital divide continues to be a serious problem, particularly for LDCs, and ITU's Telecommunication Development Sector is an important platform that tackles this problem

(ITU 020040)

ITU Secretary-General, Yoshio Utsumi, shares a joke with Fatih Mehmet Yurdal, Chairman of WTDC-02, after presenting him with the ITU Gold medal as the first person to have chaired two major ITU world conferences

(ITU 020039)

with a coherent and comprehensive package," Mr Yurdal said receiving the award from the ITU Secretary-General. ∎

Istanbul Action Plan programmes

Programme 1 — Regulatory reform

The programme on regulatory reform seeks to assist regulators and policy-makers in developing and implementing policies, legislation and regulations that can help achieve sustainable development and expand access to, and use of, telecommunications including broadcasting, and information and communication technologies. In particular, the programme will focus on providing practical tools and resources for regulatory bodies to engage in reform more effectively to meet their national ICT development, access and use goals, creating safe investment opportunities and ensuring universal access to ICTs.

To this end, the programme has been designed to provide practical solutions to enable effective regulation, particularly in response to convergence trends whereby similar services can be delivered over different types of networks.

Programme 2 — Technologies and telecommunication network development

Under this programme, activities will focus on applied research and the transfer of technological knowledge to developing countries and economies in transition in the areas of planning, building, operating, upgrading, managing and maintaining telecommunication networks. The network planning activities in this programme will incorporate traffic and demand forecasting, network management, including spectrum management and radio monitoring, interconnectivity, interoperability and quality of service standards for wireline and wireless networks, terrestrial mobile communications and broadcasting.

Programme 3 — E-strategies and applications

This brand new programme aims to improve the quality of life of men and women particularly in low-income rural and under-served areas through community access. The goal is to ensure sustainability and affordability in the development of telecommunication networks and ICTs and to harness their potential so as to contribute to reducing the social divide. The integration of IP-based applications and value-added services in the development of all telecommunication networks will be given priority as will the promotion of e-government, e-commerce, e-agriculture, e-health, e-community, e-learning, e-cinema, teleworking and webcasting in developing countries.

Other priorities of the programme include the expansion of multipurpose platforms and multipurpose community telecentres, the enhancement of security and building confidence in the use of public networks for value-added applications and services. Special attention will be given to ICT-literacy and public awareness building.

Programme 4 — Economics and Finance, including cost and tariffs

In today's competitive environment where the focus has shifted from State funding of infrastructure and services to private sector investment, developing countries in particular need new guidelines on economic analysis, financing policies and strategies that encourage lower costs for end users.

Under this programme, ITU will assist developing countries, especially LDCs, to develop and implement financing policies and strategies appropriate to their economic situation, including cost-orientated pricing, with a view to fostering equitable and affordable access to innovative and sustainable services. The focus will be on the introduction of new financing schemes for the development of their telecommunication/ICT networks and services,

including broadcasting; universal access programmes through projects that are economically viable; the integration of policy and strategy changes in the trade environment of telecommunication/ICT services and, finally, the determination of cost of retail services and cost-based interconnection rates.

Programme 5 — Human capacity building

The lack of a strong base of competencies in all key areas of telecommunication and ICTs has been singled out as one of the key problems facing developing countries. This programme will, therefore, work towards strengthening the human, institutional and organizational capacity of developing countries through human resources management and development activities. It will, in particular, address the capacity development needs of policy-makers and regulators at government level, as well as senior executives and managers from among the operators and service providers. An appropriate mix of e-learning, information technologies and traditional training methods will be used to this end. These human capacity building measures are expected to facilitate a smooth transition to the new telecommunication and ICT environment.

Programme 6 — Special programme for least developed countries

The goal of this programme is to provide focused and differentiated assistance to the world's least developed countries in all the development activities of ITU in order to fully meet the urban telecommunication needs of LDCs and provide access in rural areas. In concrete terms, the programme seeks to increase the average telephone density to 5 main lines per 100 inhabitants and Internet connections to 10 users per 100 inhabitants by the year 2010.

Whilst the old strategy of selecting a few countries to benefit from concentrated assistance on a yearly basis has improved the provision of assistance, it is time for a new strategy. For the next four years, a biennial approach will be used to direct assistance to twelve coun-

tries for a period of two years rather than to six countries per year to allow for a more sustained follow-up of actions taken, including possible evaluation, and a mustering of partnerships through partnership roundtables and other means of mobilizing resources. Given that half of the LDCs (20 countries) have now been covered under the old strategy, the new strategy will make it possible to deliver assistance to all the remaining countries during the next cycle and possibly to start a second round for the most needy ones.

Priority areas for this programme are: development of rural telecommunications to bring about easy access to telecommunication services in the rural areas where the majority of the population in LDCs lives; development of infrastructure and introduction of new technologies and services through which LDCs will receive assistance on technological choice; sector restructuring to bring about liberalization and competition and, possibly, privatization as applicable with the objective of inducing faster network growth and better management of the sector; human resources development/management; financing and partnerships, aimed at pooling resources and directing the aggregated resources to LDCs so as to avoid duplication of effort and wastage of resources. Bilateral initiatives between the programme and its constellation of contacts will also be promoted so as to attract financial inflows to LDCs.

Countries in special need

In parallel, ITU's roster of countries emerging from war and civil strife and natural disasters was expanded from Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda and Somalia to include Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. There was a consensus to create a specific budget for these countries to supplement financial support provided on an ad-hoc basis from the surplus funds generated at ITU TELECOM exhibitions. These countries will receive assistance, especially in restoring infrastructure that was destroyed and in putting in place new networks to jump-start their telecommunication sector. ■

Study Group work programme

The Istanbul Action Plan includes a series of studies to be undertaken by the membership in the next four years with a view to proposing best practices, recommendations and policy guidelines for the benefit of developing countries. Known as "Questions", the new topics approved at the Conference reflect the key concerns of developing countries and cover a wide range of issues such as universal access, interconnection, introduction of IP technologies, e-commerce and e-health, migration of mobile networks from first or second to third-generation and migration from circuit-switched to packet-switched networks.

New questions also include issues such as the domestic enforcement of laws, rules and regulations on telecommunications by national telecommunication regulatory authorities, satellite regulation and the valuation of spectrum to enable developing countries, in particular LDCs, to elaborate a national frequency fee calculation model for the various charges and fees levied on spectrum users.

Other measures adopted by the Conference with respect to study groups include the flexibility to set up focus groups or project groups to address emerging issues that require rapid reaction in order to meet the requirements of developing countries in a timely manner.

Cross-cutting activities

Statistics and information on telecommunications/ICTs

Statistics and analysis explaining trends are crucial for benchmarking countries, evaluating e-readiness and making informed national policy, legislation and regulatory choices for both ICT and telecommunication development. Statistics and analysis form the basis for objective and measurable indicators on what is happening in the global information economy and society.

BDT has therefore been tasked to continue its work in data collection and analysis forming the basis for its World Telecommunication Development Report, and Yearbook of Statistics. In addition, it will produce reports providing comparisons of e-readiness and recommendations to improve e-readiness.

It will also conduct case studies and produce reports highlighting telecommunication/ICT market developments and trends. It will provide expert assistance to countries on how to collect, compile and disseminate telecommunication/ICT indicators and will organize symposia/seminars for regulators, national statistical agencies, telecommunication/ICT organizations and policy-makers which provide a forum for the exchange of opinions, views and experiences among countries on collection and use of such indicators. Seminars will also be organized in collaboration with regional and sub-regional telecommunication organizations to provide a forum for the discussion of digital divide issues, including Internet development and barriers.

Partnerships and promotion

In order mobilize additional resources to support development projects, BDT will develop and implement strategies and campaigns to promote public-private sector partnerships and strengthen the role of the private sector in telecommunication development. To this end, BDT will create a new access Portal to Private Sector Investment Initiatives, with an entry by country, giving easy access to direct investment favourable information (e.g. success stories, projects for environment improvement) or links to information provided by other organizations. A database of all kinds of partnership agreements between BDT and private and public sector organizations and companies will also be created and participation of various types of partners in the development of networks and services will be facilitated by promoting mutually beneficial partnerships and alliances. ■

Special Initiatives

Private sector

Partnership roundtables and colloquia to strengthen cooperation with the private sector have proved successful in mobilizing resources and facilitating partnerships for various initiatives, such as special actions for LDCs and human resources development. Building on this success, the Istanbul Action Plan has included special action to encourage more private sector entities to become ITU–D Members and to partner with telecommunication entities in developing countries — especially with those in LDCs — based on the principles of transparency and non-exclusivity to partnership opportunities and projects.

The Working Group of the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group dealing with private sector issues (which operated as a subgroup prior to WTDC-02) is to recommend ways of incorporating into the ITU–D strategy, programme design and project delivery private sector issues relevant to the membership. It can also propose changes to ITU–D processes, practices and projects to facilitate and encourage private sector support, cooperation and participation.

Gender

Norway's pledge to fund the establishment of a gender unit in ITU–D has made it possible to include gender-based initiatives in each of the programmes of the Istanbul Action Plan. One of the conclusions of WTDC-02 is to request the upcoming Plenipotentiary Conference in Marrakesh to consider the establishment of an ITU Gender Unit with full-time professional gender expertise, so that gender mainstreaming for ITU as a whole is continued and sustained. ITU Member States are urged to submit proposals to the Marrakesh Conference to this end.

Youth

The Conference noted the extraordinary success of the Youth Forum launched at ITU AFRICA TELECOM 2001. It went on to consider the concerns expressed by the youth in the ITU AFRICA TELECOM 2001 Youth Forum Declaration on education, technology, promoting peace and development, investment, policy and regulation on developing a regional network. One of the needs expressed by the African youth was that ITU should continue to involve them in its major events. Recognizing the enthusiasm and the ideals that youth can bring to the telecommunication sector and their desire to create and work for a fair and better world, the Conference instructed BDT to seek appropriate means to integrate youth issues into its activities, including through programmes with emphasis on capacity building. Furthermore, ITU–D as a whole is to continue lending support to subsequent Youth Forums in order to promote the interests and capabilities of youth in ICTs as a means of linking ITU's development efforts with the leaders of tomorrow.

Indigenous people

Considering that the cultural development of a country needs to recognize both majority and minority cultures within the population and that access to telecommunication systems by indigenous peoples has a particular set of issues associated with it, the Conference decided to include in the Istanbul Action Plan a special initiative aimed at creating among indigenous people awareness of the benefits of telecommunications. Particular attention will be paid to identifying the barriers to access to telecommunication systems and recommending ways to overcome them. ■