



*Europe and
the Commonwealth
of Independent States*

 **How to Build Open Information Societies**
A Collection of Best Practices and Know-How

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Preface

This book was prepared by UNDP's Regional Centre in Bratislava, Slovakia, within the regional Democratic Governance framework, in close cooperation with UNDP field offices in 19 countries that generously shared their experience and knowledge in using information and communication technology for development (ICTD).

Dedicated to the first meeting of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Geneva during 10–12 December 2003, this publication presents a collection of knowledge-based best practices accumulated by UNDP in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Its main purpose is to identify and share UNDP's know-how in this rapidly emerging area, by showing how ICT can promote socio-economic development and good governance.

The articles collected here give readers – be they professionals living in capital cities or residents of small remote towns – a glimpse of the powerful transformative force ICT can be when deployed wisely. ICT offers the leapfrogging development potential that less developed countries can use to build modern, competitive, mobile, versatile, and ultimately democratic societies – open information societies for all their citizens.

We believe that the wealth of knowledge contained in this book will promote inter-country exchange of best practices and innovative knowledge. Best practices and know-how can be borrowed from one country and creatively applied in another. The information society, via its numerous and growing e-governance tools, can also help to alleviate poverty. ICT creates new opportunities for income generation by helping to make governance systems more transparent, efficient, and accessible.

UNDP is seeking ways to harness ICT's leapfrogging potential to move towards a knowledge-based economy and society.¹ This is of particular significance for meeting the Millennium Development Goals agreed upon at the Millennium Summit in September 2000. The information society in general, and e-governance in particular, can help to meet all eight Millennium Development Goals and their corresponding targets. ICT for development is particularly relevant for Goal 8, Developing Global Partnerships for Development, and its related Target 18, In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies – especially ICTs.

Many countries have contributed to this publication, and I would like to sincerely thank all contributing colleagues and authors. We are particularly grateful to our country colleagues and their counterparts from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan for their most interesting contributions. The updated ICTD Country Profiles submitted by Croatia, Moldova, the Russian Federation, and Serbia and Montenegro, and Kosovo, contain valuable overviews of present and future activities, and are very much appreciated. I am grateful to my Bratislava colleagues, namely to Marcia Kran, Chief Technical Advisor of the Democratic Governance Programme, for overall guidance; Yuri Misnikov, ICT for Development Regional Programme Coordinator, for coordinating this work; and François Fortier, ICT for Development Regional Advisor, for providing important input. Special thanks go to Amy Mahan, Senior Researcher for LIRNE.net, for the highly professional editing work of the entire publication. Finally, we are thankful to Kye Bernard, our Bratislava intern, who helped to put the publication together.

Together with our country colleagues, we believe that the WSIS Plan of Action and Declaration of Principles unanimously adopted in Geneva have put the information society on the development agenda as a new global priority and challenge, both for ICT-savvy countries and for those just starting to build the foundations of information societies. We also believe that UNDP's rich experience can help accelerate the pace of ICTD during the next two years, before the second part of the WSIS takes place in Tunis, in 2005.

Finally, we hope that this publication will help other countries and regions to make better use of ICT. We welcome contact from those wanting further information and/or who are interested in becoming a partner in building an open information society for all.

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¹ More information on how ICT and development are interrelated can be found in the *Digital Opportunity Initiative* report prepared by UNDP, Accenture and the Markle Foundation, available at <www.opt-init.org>.

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Introduction: Basic Principles from Lessons Learned

Amy Mahan & Yuri Misnikov

It is often cautioned that there is no one-size fits all policy prescription for national information and communication technology (ICT) development. Although most nations aspire to the ultimate outcomes of information society participation, existing national endowments and resources will have bearing on the rapidity with which new technologies and services can be absorbed by existing institutions and effectively deployed throughout society. The goal of a robust information infrastructure and corresponding participation in the global information society holds many promises: an efficient and transparent public sector, a skilled work-force with good access to basic education and life-long learning, a strong foundation for the economy, and more. However, for many countries, these are utopian ideals which are supplanted by more basic needs, such as those focussed on in the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Different factors will have bearing on what aspects of infrastructure development need to be prioritised for each country. The programmes detailed in this book illustrate a range of approaches. While there are different starting points, there are nonetheless some common principles for successful national policy creation and programme deployment. These examples show that across national demographics, geographies, political infrastructure, and market development, there are some common best practice approaches for ICT development. The following summary of Lessons Learned provides some insight into the creativity and sensitivity of programme design and implementation, tailored to the specific national requirements, local culture and varying infrastructural starting points.

Policy Formation

Many of the projects described here have focussed on the policy formation stage. National ICT Strategies, Information Society Plans and their corresponding Action Plans are fundamental first steps for taking stock of a country's ICT status and future requirements and vision (see for example, the chapters for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). Many of the countries discussed here are at that initial stage of policy formation, creating privatised telecom markets, opening their economies, and working to make their markets more attractive for foreign direct investment.

Projects in different areas and sectors must be mutually reinforcing. This is a cross-cutting theme that is highlighted in many of the national programmes in terms of the need for a supportive policy and legislative environment. For example:

- Access to ICTs will be supported by a competitive environment – which needs to be provided for in telecommunications and other information infrastructure policy;
- E-governance initiatives presume an environment of transparency and open access to government information and services;

- Some online courses and training will require educational accreditation and standardisation; and so forth.

The policy and legislative context is also underscored throughout this book because of the UNDP's particular focus on governance and working to support governments in this regard.

Intermediaries as ICTD Knowledge-brokers

Intermediaries refer to both the people and technologies used to deliver information. Already known and trusted intermediaries were implicit to the success of probably all of the projects. In a few of the chapters, this aspect is explicitly highlighted:

- The historically active and nationally prevalent Chitalishte reading centres were central to Bulgaria's introduction of ICT projects. Already trusted within the communities and located throughout the country, they offered a place to house ICTs within the communities and as well as a familiar learning context. Community organisations and local NGOs were able to provide such a local context for cooperation for many of the programmes.
- For the youthful target participants of Romania's Sexdex education programme, the choices of intermediaries were of vital importance for conferring trust, privacy and subject matter expertise without a preaching authority. For this project, intermediaries had to be considered on two levels: technological context and project personnel. As much as it was important that a known radio personality was recruited to work with the project and the young adults, it was equally vital that the project afforded a "collective confidentiality" via Internet, anonymous radio call-in and classroom discussions.
- In one instance of national strategy and policy formulation, the assigned UNDP counterpart was the relatively junior entity, the State Student Admission Commission of Azerbaijan. This appointment was strategically chosen both because of the entity's political credibility in terms of a past-track record and because of its lack of political seniority rendered it a less-likely target for machinations and undermining.

Open Dialogue and Active Participation

Another key theme across many of the chapters is the need for and the benefits of participatory dialogue among stakeholders, participants, beneficiaries and donors – both prior to and during the project implementation. Discussion and input goes to the issue of project ownership among the various stakeholders.

The Azerbaijan case study notes that for national ICT strategy development there tend to be two key patterns. One relies upon open participatory consultation and a second on more closed expert driven process carried out at the ministerial level in concert with existing government agendas. In actual fact, the Azeri example deviated from either



of these approaches. And, generally across the different chapters, readers will note that within these two frameworks, there were as many different ways of engendering dialogue and participation, as there were projects. Nonetheless, there are some overarching best practices and principles.

- For projects in the regions and rural areas, participation of local authorities and the municipal mayors was crucial. Enlisting local representatives of project stakeholders worked towards ensuring better participation, contribution of local resources (such as locations to house the projects), and less resistance to the project (see Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Macedonia).
- Creating opportunities for discussion included roundtables held throughout the country, such as described in the case studies for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tajikistan and Ukraine. In the same vein, Lithuania organised seminars for leaders, volunteers and trainers to discuss particular topics with regards to programme development and to strengthen the organising community.
- For many of the countries, online forums for discussion were also particularly important opportunities, such as Albania's online discussion of regional development strategies, the Armenian Freenet's forums to promote e-democracy, Kyrgyzstan's Public Access Points to increase awareness about programmes and to facilitate communication between stakeholders.

Improving Education and Access to Education

The levels of educational attainment and opportunities vary across the different project countries, and in many cases, across gender or different regions of particular countries. Because of economic globalisation even highly skilled workforces require opportunities for retraining or further education.

The chapters for Belarus, Georgia and Tajikistan, for example, emphasise that the end goal must not be to simply provide new technology, but rather to mobilise ICTs as powerful tools for information exchange, expansion of knowledge and for the development of individuals and institutions. This theme is echoed throughout the different national programmes' experiences. Deployment of new ICT technologies and services must be accompanied with corresponding opportunities to learn how to use these in different contexts. In the same vein, information about the benefits must also be made available, as people and institutions need to be given reasons and incentives for changing existing practices.

Schools, universities, libraries and research institutes are strategic sites for ICT deployment. Adequate access to technology and bandwidth are important factors supporting the work that people do in these institutions. To a certain extent, because of the learning cultures already implicit, the expectation of corresponding training in new applications was highly evident. The introduction of ICTs into formal learning environments also clearly targets the next generation of information society workers. Clearly youth have a thirst for ICT applications and services as different projects documented large numbers of young people flocking to Internet access centres.

Training and educational programmes targeting users outside of university and other learning environments generally noted a need for concerted efforts to be made around

the issue of popularising the opportunity. The Umbrella Project in Poland, for example, has had an enthusiastic response from participants in its low-cost online training programme, but this is offset by the fact of having only a fraction of the participants it originally anticipated.

Improving Gender Equality in Access to ICTs

The chapter for Lithuania references research documenting overall low female participation in ICTs – for both personal use and at an institutional level in terms of women's organisations having access to ICT resources. This research is key. Knowledge about who is using and benefiting from projects provides important information for further targeted development. Ideally, all programmes will include a specific gender focus. A minimum expectation might be for all programmes to identify benefits arising from gender development.

Interestingly, the projects surveyed here that do measure for gender indicate high levels of participation. The Azerbaijan Customs and Gender survey documented a doubling of female staff over the last four years and their active involvement in training activities; the Kyrgyzstan Public Access Points documented traffic by gender for different centres, most of which was significantly high; for the Macedonia study, women make up two-thirds of all trainees; and for Turkmenistan's InfoTuk training programme, 60 percent of trainees are women. One thing we can surmise here is that the particular choice of indicators reveals the intended group of inclusion. The lack of indicators for gender in a given project is in itself revealing.

For projects directed at people who are marginalised in different ways (rural or isolated communities, women, the unemployed, the elderly), a safe learning context and supportive environment is crucial for participation and ultimately benefiting from the project. Lack of familiarity with and previous access to ICTs, and in many cases a home bound existence may initially hinder or dissuade women from taking advantage of ICT-related opportunities. However, online discussion and learning opportunities for women may be, in many instances and cultures, more comfortable than traditional learning and discussion environments. The online environment offers a "collective confidentiality" (so important to the Romanian Sexdex project noted above), a less physically public environment, the ability to learn at one's own pace, flexibility rather than fixed hours for participation, and participation in discussions in a text-based environment which foregrounds content rather than appearance or ability to be louder than the next person.

Developing Information Resources and Knowledge Networks

ICT programmes to support information management and to develop national knowledge resources are important for access, efficiency and effectiveness of government services, donor community programmes and specific projects at both national and international levels. These repositories of organised and accessible data and information serve to inform and strengthen the focus of projects, and to reduce duplication of efforts.

Particular examples of access to government information and more efficient government services are demonstrated by the number of countries that now offer well-designed and easy-to-use government portals. Many of these are part of broader programmes designed to promote citizen participation in discussions on development issues and ICT agendas, increase transparency, and to provide better access to services and information. Apart from these overarching programmes, many of the studies in this book document initiatives with a specialised focus, such as:

- Armenia's government portal which streamlines visa applications for visitors to the country, and Turkey's Consulate Automation Programme and the Virtual Consulate, both aimed at improving services to nationals abroad;
- Azerbaijan's State Customs Committee which implemented ICT to coordinate national information, resulting in direct benefits such as a significant increase in customs revenue collection, and better efficiency in processing declarations;
- Kazakhstan's initiatives for managing information about the environment, the country itself, and national donor information;
- Albania's data collection and information management for tracking and reclaiming weapons, disarming minefields and confronting organised crime.

Private Sector Partnerships

Private sector project support is well-documented across the projects (in particular see Poland and Uzbekistan). There are many examples of the private sector working in partnership with the projects, providing expertise in particular technologies and applications, donating software and access to infrastructure (e.g. Microsoft in Lithuania, Cisco Systems in Bulgaria). Other benefits can include using private sector business models to achieve sustainability, such as described for some of the Bulgarian and Uzbekistan project services.

Conversely, ICTD projects also provide benefits to the private sector and support economic development. For the ICT sector, for example:

- ICTD projects create awareness about ICT services and applications, this in turn can stimulate demand in the private sector due to increased volume of demand that the development project may not be able to meet.
- ICTD projects increase individual and institutional capacities necessary for a critical mass of users, and hence contribute to the creation of a viable market for such technology and services.
- ICTD projects can be used as test beds for assessing markets for new technologies and services, such as described for the Umbrella project collaboration with ComputerLand in Poland.

At a more local level, ICTD projects also provide important support for small and medium-sized businesses – for example by giving farmers access to market prices, through e-commerce opportunities, or by simply creating an environment of more transparent business practices.

Conclusions

The above examples and cases do not exhaust by any means all the lessons learned by UNDP while implementing projects on behalf of its host governments and local and

international partners. Similarly, each country could present other successful cases as presented in the country profiles.

The collection here of stories and programme assessments detail the concerted efforts and collective will to open channels for communication, learning and resources. For many of the instances in which challenges have been the greatest, ingenuity and creativity have been strongest. This is the overall lesson learned – that ICT for development is an imperative, and this has been recognised.

