

Information and Communications Technology

It's a golden opportunity for us. We've only heard about the Internet—about 50 percent of the country doesn't know what it is.

Abdul Razak Yusoff,
Malaysian teacher

The information revolution is changing everything about the world we live in, including the practice of development. Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have the potential to create jobs, improve access to basic services, increase the effectiveness of governments and facilitate the sharing of information with people, especially the poor and women, living in even remote parts of developing countries.

But many communities in developing nations still lack the fundamental services that would allow them to enter the Information Age. Today, sub-Saharan Africa has nearly 10 percent of the world's population but only one-tenth of one percent of global Internet connections. Half the world's population has yet to use a telephone. As technology makes up an ever-more important part of the global economy, countries without resources are being left further and further behind.

ICT is now a basic component of development, not a luxury. It is up to us to ensure that the explosive growth in information technology opens up new possibilities for developing nations—not a wider gap between them and the developed world. Development now must use technology to improve its own practices and to offer the poor new choices to build better lives.

UNDP has put itself at the forefront of the communications revolution in the developing world. That means helping governments to get technology policies right so as to put in place appropriate communications infrastructures. It means finding innovative ways to promote digital entrepreneurship and economic growth to improve the lives of ordinary people and reduce social and gender inequities. And it means working with private sector partners to help bring reliable, affordable communications

networks to immense new markets.

With the World Bank, UNDP has hosted the secretariat for the **Digital Opportunity Task Force**, or *DOT Force*, a pioneering partnership among G8 nations, developing countries, the private sector and NGOs established after the G8 Summit in Okinawa, Japan in 2000. The task force has produced a report outlining key actions and recommendations for stakeholders to address the digital divide; increasing access and lowering cost; building human capacity; and developing-country participation in global e-commerce networks.

With the Markle Foundation and Accenture, UNDP's **Digital Opportunity Initiative** will help countries develop national strategies for harnessing technology to provide benefits such as land use databases, village phone services, or cutting edge telemedicine. The **Global Readiness and Resource Initiative**, a public-private partnership with the Markle Foundation, will offer international ICT experts to work with developing countries to help develop their national e-strategies. With Cisco Systems, the US Peace Corps and UN Volunteers, UNDP has launched a programme to provide Internet training in 24 of the least developed countries.

Since 1993, UNDP has connected 45 nations to the Internet for the very first time and trained more than 25,000 organizations and institutions. In 2000, UNDP set up the first indigenous network in **East Timor**. UNDP helped one of its first partners, **Estonia**, develop the foundations of its telecommunications law, and create its first public Internet access sites. The government has since set up more than 80 such sites, plans to have 300 by 2002, and has declared Internet access a human right. It is now one of the most wired places on earth.

UNDP helped Estonia become one of the most wired places in the world.



INTERNET USERS BY REGION

	Percentage of population
United States	54.3
High income OECD (excluding US)	28.2
Eastern Europe and CIS	3.9
Latin America & the Caribbean	3.2
East Asia & the Pacific	2.3
Arab States	0.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.4
South Asia	0.4

Source: Human Development Report Office/UNDP



Bedouin women in Jordan learn to surf the Web.

UNDP pioneered Mobile Internet Units—computer centres on wheels, which help train young people in even the most rural areas—and put the concept into use from Malaysia to **Mali**. In **Malaysia**, a pilot project that began with four units has now expanded to 20 and, with government and private sector support, will be putting computers in schools and creating an e-mail network.

Across **Latin America** and **Africa**, UNDP has helped bring entire government ministries online and create unprecedented access to services and information. And UNDP has brought computer centres to hard-to-reach rural communities such as Bedouins in **Jordan**. Around the world, the lines outside UNDP's answer to Internet cafés tell us we are tapping into a vital—and vitally-felt—need.

UNDP is also using the Internet to build a new, interactive constituency for development. In 1999, with Cisco Systems, international and non-governmental organizations, UNDP launched www.netaid.org, a high-tech forum for development. Visitors tour the site, learning how they can help fight poverty and promote development. The registered **Netaid.org** community stands at more than 20,000 individuals, 2,588 NGOs and 423 corporate members and almost \$2 million awarded for programmes.

UNDP shares a vision with its developing country partners: that soon, developing-country leaders and citizens can contribute on more equal

terms to global dialogue and communications over the Web. Budding entrepreneurs everywhere will gain access to clients and services from anywhere. And the benefits of the global information revolution will at last be truly global. ■

SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION: SHARING EXPERTISE

In an era of rapid change and technological growth, the Governments of Brazil and India, or any two developing nations, may well have more to share with each other than either can learn from any development professional. UNDP provides a platform for cooperation among developing nations unmatched by any other organization—promoting exchanges, partnerships, and dialogue. UNDP has sent Chileans to East Timor and Brazilians to Southern Africa, helped Latin Americans share their experience of democratization with Eastern Europe, promoted air transportation partnerships in Africa and South Asia, and encouraged better water management among the states of West Africa and the Middle East.

In March 2001, UNDP launched the WIDE Initiative (Web of Information for Development), providing on-line databases, discussion forums, and partnerships to support developing country progress in new technology.

South-South relationships help bring good new ideas to prominence, and allow every nation to contribute its experiences in helping others grow. For more information: www.undp.org/tcdc.