

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2007

Focus on Participation



Global Information Society Watch

2007



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United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Seán Ó Siocháin

Introduction

Objectives and main activities

The UNDP¹ describes itself as “the UN’s global development network, an organisation advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.” With a staff of almost 5,000, it has national offices in 166 countries.

The UNDP has dual role at the national level. On the one hand, within the context of its mandate, it provides expert advice, training, and grant support to developing countries to help achieve a range of national and international goals, such as most notably the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).² In this context, it is often regarded as the largest single source of development funding and government technical assistance within the UN system. On the other hand, it supports the coordination of UN activities at the national level through the Resident Coordinator system, which it manages, working closely with the government, agencies and other development partners.

The UNDP’s specific *focus areas* (also referred to as *practices* or *key results* in various documents) are worked out in line with changing conditions and demands for programme support from countries. They are then presented to the UNDP Executive Board for endorsement in the context of three-year programme frameworks. First established in 1999, the framework has since been referred to as the Multi-Year Funding Framework (MYFF). In the context of the current MYFF (2004-2007) the following are core goals:³

- Achieving the MDGs and reducing human poverty
- Fostering democratic governance
- Managing energy and environment for sustainable development
- Supporting crisis prevention and recovery
- Responding to HIV/AIDS.

How it can best respond to these focus areas may be refined in the context of its new programme framework for 2008 to 2011, currently under development. In any case, within the context of the priority areas, the UNDP supports projects and programmes at all levels (global, regional and national), in collaboration with numerous partners, providing advice, building capacity, and co-funding or funding innovative activities. Its annual Human Development Report is widely used and considered authoritative.

1 <www.undp.org>.

2 <www.un.org/millenniumgoals>.

3 To date these have also been the basis for the organisation of areas of work referred to as practices. In turn each practice contains service lines, which are sub-areas of work. Thirty distinct service lines were defined for the 2004-2007 MYFF; two of them focusing on ICT for development: Making ICT Work for the Poor (SL 1.8) and E-governance and Access to Information (SL 2.5). Country offices refer to the practices and service lines to frame programmes and to report on results. In the context of its new programming framework, currently under development and referred to as its Strategic Plan (2008-2011), the focus will be on key results and outcomes rather than service lines.

WEBSITE: www.undp.org

HEADQUARTERS: New York, United States of America

FOUNDED: 1965

UN STATUS: UN programme reporting to the UN General Assembly

Legal/constitutional composition

The UNDP was established in 1965 by the United Nations General Assembly, and became operational in January 1966. In resolution 2029 (XX) of 22 November 1965, the General Assembly decided “to combine the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance and the Special Fund in a programme to be known as the United Nations Development Programme” (UN General Assembly, 1965). Through decision 94/14, the Executive Board of the UNDP decided that “the overall mission of UNDP should be to assist programme countries in their endeavour to realise sustainable human development, in line with their national development programmes and priorities...” In this context, through decision 95/22, the Board urged the UNDP to concentrate on areas where it had a demonstrable comparative advantage – in particular, on capacity-building in the most needy regions and countries, such as the least-developed countries and Africa – to help them develop national capacity to achieve sustainable human development, and giving overriding priority to eradicating poverty and building equity.

Key members/participants and decision-making structures

The UNDP Executive Board, reporting to the UN General Assembly, comprises representatives from 36 countries around the world serving on a rotating basis. Through its Bureau, which is elected from the Executive Board and rotates annually among the five regional groups, the Board oversees and supports the activities of the UNDP.⁴ The Executive Board is led by an administrator appointed by the Board, currently Mr. Kemal Dervis.

Relations with other international institutions and the multilateral system

The UNDP’s formal relations with and participation in the multilateral system are defined through the UN General Assembly. The UNDP cooperates extensively with other international institutions at the national, regional and international levels.

At the country level, through the Resident Coordinator system, it also serves to facilitate UN coordination.⁵

4 See: <www.undp.org/execbrd/>.

5 For recent recommendations on strengthening this role to be considered by the General Assembly, see *Delivering as One*, the report of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on UN System-Wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Environment. Available from: <www.un.org/events/panel/resources/pdfs/HLP-SWC-FinalReport.pdf>.

Commitment to development

The UNDP is dedicated to development. As noted above, UNDP Executive Board decision 94/14 established that the overall mission of the agency should be that of assisting countries in their efforts to achieve sustainable human development. Other vital objectives for the UNDP include the advancement of women, the regeneration of the environment and the creation of sustainable livelihoods. Its mission statement, which outlines these objectives further, was endorsed by the UNDP Executive Board through decision 96/29.⁶

Commitment to gender equality

Gender equality is a crosscutting theme in the UNDP, following a three-pronged approach that aims to:

- Develop capacity, both in-country and in-house, to integrate gender concerns across UNDP practice areas
- Provide policy advice that is both pro-poor and pro-women
- Support stand-alone operational interventions for gender equality in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

In the UNDP headquarters a Gender Programme Team is charged with mainstreaming gender across UNDP areas. A Gender Thematic Trust Fund (GTF) was set up to support programme countries in their efforts to mainstream gender throughout all of their programme work. It is intended to enable institutional and cultural transformation processes, including:

- Eliminating gender biases in development frameworks and paradigms
- Incorporating gender awareness into policies, programmes and institutional reforms
- Involving men to end gender inequality
- Developing gender-sensitive tools to monitor progress and ensure accountability.

The UNDP has also established a gender knowledge network which currently has about 440 members. Its overall approach and activities are summed up in the UNDP Practice Note on Gender Equality of 2002.

UNIFEM is an administered fund of the UNDP. Set up in 1976 by the UN General Assembly, following the UN First World Conference on Women in 1975, it has fifteen regional offices around the world. According to its website it “provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies to foster women’s empowerment and gender equality.” UNIFEM’s efforts are centred on the advancement of women’s human rights, and it focuses its activities on four strategic areas: (1) reducing feminised poverty, (2) ending

violence against women, (3) reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls, and (4) achieving gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war.⁷

In addition, the UNDP is strongly committed to enhancing gender balance in the implementation of its human resource policies (UNDP, 2005).

Southern actors and civil society participation

The UNDP’s relation to civil society encompasses various dimensions and is operative at the global, national and sub-national levels. It also maintains a CSO (Civil Society Organisation) Division, part of the Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships, responsible for strengthening UNDP policy and methods for CSO collaboration at every level, including advising and supporting the UNDP country offices. According to its website:

UNDP, as the UN global development network, engages with civil society organisations (CSOs) at all levels to promote the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and support people in their efforts to build a better life. Substantive partnership with CSOs is of greater strategic importance than ever given the integral role of civil society actors in development. There is growing recognition that engagement with CSOs is critical to national ownership, accountability, good governance, decentralisation, democratisation of development cooperation, and the quality and relevance of official development programmes.⁸

A CSO Advisory Committee comprising fourteen CSO leaders offers an opportunity for debate, feedback and cooperation, including structured dialogues between the Committee and the Executive Board. CSOs can access certain UNDP funding mechanisms, including the Thematic Trust Funds, the Partnership Facility, and a Small Grants Programme. They can also participate in a number of UNDP special programmes such as Capacity 2015 (a follow-up to Capacity 21) and the Africa 2000 Plus Network.

In practice, the UNDP at the national level strongly encourages governments – including reluctant governments – to build broad-based national ownership and to include the participation of civil society in its programmes. It promotes multi-stakeholder dialogue on key policy and development objectives such as the MDGs, an approach also evident in global and regional level programmes.

Regarding Southern actors, the UNDP’s regionalised management structure and rotation ensure ongoing participation of Southern countries at the global level. Almost all country offices are located in Southern countries, and the great majority of funding is spent there. Although the UNDP headquarters is in New York, 85% of UNDP staff work in Southern countries.

Further, in 1974, UN General Assembly resolution 3251 (XXIX) created a Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (SU/TCDC) within the UNDP (UN General Assembly, 1974).

6 The UNDP’s mission statement includes numerous and significant references to development. See: <72.14.209.104/search?q=cache:32Xzh_3FVdUJ:www.undp.org/execbrd/pdf/9628205e.pdf+decision+96/29+the+Executive+Board+of+The+UNDP/UNFPA&hl=en&gl=us&ct=clnk&cd=3>.

7 <www.unifem.org/about>.

8 See: <www.undp.org/partners/cso>.

The focus of current activities is on “regional and interregional initiatives aimed at engaging a large number of countries to work together to formulate policies, share information, agree on priorities and translate ideas into programmes.” The strategic aim of the Special Unit is “to make developing countries effective partners with all other actors in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and targets set by the G-77 Havana Programme of Action, such as halving the incidence of extreme poverty by 2015.”⁹

Role and responsibilities in ICTs

The UNDP’s foundation in 1965 does not refer specifically to a remit in the area of information and communication technology (ICT). However, given its broad development focus, and the role that ICT can play in enhancing development processes and outcomes, activity was inevitably going to emerge in this area. Paragraph 70 of the second Multi-Year Funding Framework, covering the years 2004 to 2007, specifically states: “Appropriate technology is an essential ingredient in positioning UNDP as a truly knowledge-driven organisation. To this end, the ICT strategy will focus on establishing an adequate platform to facilitate the use of online collaborative tools, content and document management, and the sharing of experiences and best practices” (UNDP/UNFPA, 2003).

The UNDP’s organisational approach to supporting ICT for development (ICTD) has evolved over time. A number of ICTD programmes at the global, national and regional levels date back to the early 1990s.

Early ICT Activities

The Sustainable Development Networking Programme (SDNP), launched from the 1992 Rio Summit as a support measure for Agenda 21, was the first major global effort, although even before that, early forays into ICTs included the Alternex project, developed with UNDP support by IBASE in the late 1980s and Brazil’s first and only independent internet service provider (ISP) until 1994.

The SDNP could be viewed as the first systematic *global* ICTD programme backed by a coherent rationale, and for some time was a strong advocate of what later became known as ICTD within the UNDP. The SDNP aimed to facilitate access to information for development stakeholders and to encourage greater participation by all development actors. Run by a small team from UNDP headquarters but with the support of country offices, it collaborated with a range of actors to create SDNP programmes in 44 countries. Its core funding was about USD 9 million, disbursed between 1992 and 2002, but it leveraged considerably more for national SDNP activities, certainly over twice that figure. While not all programmes were successful, many helped to influence ICTD policies through the SDNP’s multi-stakeholder steering committees and through the capacity that it helped to strengthen in what was then an emerging area. Further, quite a few national SDNPs became their country’s first ISPs, even achieving market dominance for some years, and many continue successfully

today. Networking local communities and stakeholders and facilitating internet access were usually a priority, with most resources devoted to knowledge generation and distribution, capacity building, training and the provision of a range of ICT-based services. Overall, the programmes were pioneering in terms of applying ICTs to issues of development and sustainability, and significantly influenced subsequent UNDP regional activities such as the Internet Initiative for Africa (IIA) and the Asia Pacific Development Internet Programme (APDIP).

During the 1990s, the UNDP began to support individual projects and initiatives based on ICTs or with a significant ICT component at the country level, building up a considerable portfolio over the years. In addition to dedicated ICTD programme/project managers/focal points for some of the larger country programmes, the UNDP country offices were also assisted by ICTD policy advisors based in the UNDP’s Sub-Regional Resource Facilities (SURFs) or Regional Service Centres where its regional programmes are housed and/or by policy advisors at the global level (housed in the Poverty Reduction and Democratic Governance groups in the Bureau for Development Policy). At present these key regional ICTD programmes comprise:

- ICT for Development in the Arab Region (ICTDAR)¹⁰
- Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP)¹¹
- ICTD component of a larger democratic governance programme for Europe and CIS¹²
- E-governance and support to ICT for the MDGs, Regional Service Centre in Dakar, Senegal.¹³

Between 2000 and 2003, the UNDP had a dedicated ICTD “special initiative” – essentially a new focus area or practice – within its Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) to support country offices in the development of national e-strategies and interventions and to identify emerging strategic areas for effective deployment of ICT for development.¹⁴ BDP/ICTD staff was based in New York, with out-posted policy advisors in most regions (Latin America, Africa, Europe and CIS and the Arab States). This initiative is discussed in further detail below.

In late 2003, in the context of developing a new MYFF for 2004–2007 and with a view to ensuring a closer integration of ICTD with its main areas of work, the UNDP realigned its approach to focus particularly on the deployment of ICT for poverty reduction (Service Line 1.8: *Making ICT Work for the Poor*) and the promotion of democratic

10 www.sdnq.undp.org/it4dev/docs/yp/regional_ictdar.html

11 APDIP seeks to assist national and regional institutions in Asia-Pacific to improve access, knowledge-sharing, networking and management, and the application of ICTs for social and economic development. APDIP also helps to target and focus regional ICT initiatives to achieve relevant development goals by making ICT an integral part of development cooperation and solutions, so that developing countries and their partners in the Asia-Pacific region can work to address economic, social and digital divides in more innovative and effective ways. See: www.apdip.net.

12 europeandcis.undp.org/?menu=p_practice&FocusAreaId=14.

13 www.undp.org/surf-wa/ICTPOVMDGs/index.htm.

14 See: sdnq.undp.org/it4dev/docs/about_undp.html.

9 See: tcdc.undp.org/faq.asp#SU/TCDC.

governance (Service Line 2.5: *E-governance and Access to Information*) (UNDP/UNFPA, 2003). In the case of the MYFF or strategic plan for 2008-2011, there appears to be a shift away from specific service lines more generally towards key results and outcomes. In this context, ICTD will more likely be visible as a mechanism to achieve selected development outcomes.

Issues regarding the evolution of ICTD within the UNDP

The UNDP's experience in ICTD highlights some key challenges and opportunities facing international development organisations lacking an a priori focus on ICTD: i.e. whether to maintain a separate unit or to mainstream ICTD expertise and programming across its existing areas.

With the arrival in 1999 of a new UNDP administrator, Mark Malloch Brown, "moving upstream" became the motto, meaning that the UNDP would seek to focus more on providing assistance to develop strategy, policies and institutions at national level with a view to scaling up activities, and would focus less on direct support to individual programmes and projects. In relation to ICTD, this meant that support moved towards "helping to achieve a policy environment that encourages domestic and international provision of information technology and other services and away from the actual delivery of those services, which is what we are currently doing" (Brown, n.d., p. 7).

Project level activity continued, but "the greatest impact of UNDP on poverty eradication is upstream, at the level of policies and institutions, rather than in the stand-alone projects, which are often relatively expensive and reach only a limited number of beneficiaries." The implications of this approach were "a much greater emphasis on partnerships, and the adoption of a catalytic, brokering role" (Brown, n.d., p. 8).

In 2000, during the period of the first MYFF for 2000-2003, ICTD was supported, as mentioned above, by the launch of a dedicated ICTD initiative which in effect created a sixth global focus area (UNDP/UNFPA, 1999). In line with the other practices, in October 2001, a Thematic ICTD Trust Fund – an instrument to provide catalytic funding, support innovation, and attract donor money – was launched with an initial commitment of USD 5 million from the Government of Japan. This was later topped up with a further USD 2 million from the Government of Japan and contributions from other selected donors, most recently the Government of Spain.

At the time, the UNDP was not just moving ICTD up to policy level; it was promoting a new approach to policy. The UNDP argued the need to go beyond conceiving of ICTs as a specific *sectoral* issue, a position that had characterised the major global thrust during the 1990s to liberalise telecoms markets and open developing countries to foreign ownership. Now the UNDP was seeking to draw a clear distinction between ICT policy geared towards creating an advanced ICT sector and services, and an ICTD policy aiming to maximise the positive overall impact of ICTs on development.

This shift from ICT as sector to ICT as horizontal development enabler was strategically outlined in the Digital Opportunity Initiative (DOI), developed by the UNDP in collaboration with Accenture and the Markle Foundation. Launched in July 2001 with the publication of

the report *Creating a Development Dynamic*, it offered a coherent generic approach at country level to designing and implementing an ICT strategy aimed specifically at contributing to development and to social as well as economic goals. It underlined the need to involve the "full range of stakeholders in international development – governments, both industrialised and developing, the business and non-profit sectors, multilateral agencies, and community organisations on the ground" (DOI, 2001). Based on the analytical framework and lessons culled from research and specific case studies of national e-strategies, the report also explored the potential for offering catalytic support in selected countries such as South Africa, Romania, Mozambique and Bolivia through the initiative. In addition, the DOI framework also formed the corporate framework for the UNDP's own support to countries in developing their national strategies and programmes.

This belief in partnerships and in stakeholder participation was reflected in subsequent initiatives in which the UNDP is involved at the global level. The Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force), whose secretariat was co-hosted by the World Bank and the UNDP, was created at the G8 meeting in July 2000 in Okinawa.¹⁵ It was one of the first multi-stakeholder global ICT task forces, bringing together government, industry and civil society from G8 countries, and government representatives from selected developing countries, to design an action plan, delivered in June 2002, to expand the use of ICT and universalise its benefits.

The UN ICT Task Force was launched by the UN secretary-general in November 2001, with the UNDP playing a key role in its founding. With broad representation, it was a "cooperative effort to identify ways in which the digital revolution can benefit all the world's people" (UNDP, 2004a). This eventually evolved into the Global Alliance for ICT for Development (GAID).

Other international collaborations were undertaken with a more programmatic focus and modest UNDP input. With CISCO Systems and United Nations Volunteers, for example, a partnership was formed to set up training academies for internet skills in least-developed countries. The UNDP was also a partner in NetAid, and with a cash grant from the Coca Cola Foundation also supports e-learning activities in Malaysia (2000) and Bolivia (2002).

The UNDP has been an active member of the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), participating in its major events and networking activities, and has been involved in establishing partnership initiatives with civil society and the private sector at the regional and national levels as well. More recent regional public-private collaborations include the joint research initiative undertaken by UNDP-APDIP, the International Open Source Network (IOSN), IBM and Oracle to help Asia-Pacific countries share and create strategies, blueprints and policies for adopting the right blend of open standards and technology services.

15 The G8 Summit in Okinawa agreed the Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society, in which the leaders agreed to establish the DOT Force. It was actually formed and first met in November 2000. Its key strategy document was *Digital Opportunities for All: Meeting the Challenge*, presented and approved at the G8 meeting in Genoa in July 2001. See: <www.dotforce.org>.

The designation of ICTD as a UNDP focus or practice area from 2000 until 2003 helped raise the profile of ICTD, and awareness of its development potential was strengthened at the national level. The years following 2000 saw a significant increase in UNDP projects supported at the national level. However, the timing of the stronger move into ICTD proved, in one respect, to be unfortunate: the “dotcom” bubble had just burst and the telecommunications crash was impending. These events strengthened a perception in some quarters that the development potential of ICT had been over-emphasised, which tended to weaken the potential of the ICTD practice area just as it had begun to assist a number of countries in laying the foundations for more development-oriented ICT policies. At the same time, they negatively affected the capacity to attract funding for ICTD programmes in a variety of institutions – including the UNDP Thematic ICTD Trust Fund – as both the private sector and governments decided to cut back on investment in the area.

As indicated earlier, in late 2003, in the context of the development of the new MYFF for 2004-2007, a decision was taken to mainstream ICTs back into the other focus areas, specifically poverty reduction and democratic governance. This in itself was not a bad thing – indeed it could be seen as a natural progression – since ICTD itself is a cross-cutting issue, and such mainstreaming allows a closer engagement with and integration within governance and poverty policies and programmes, two key areas in which ICT can have a significant development impact. In the short term, however, the shift had a negative impact and the number of UNDP country offices reporting ICTD activities fell significantly. Furthermore, it resulted in a reduction of the resources available to ICTD at the headquarters level.

WSIS-related activities

UNDP involvement in the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)¹⁶ was relatively modest coming as it did in the wake of organisational changes in ICTD practice at the global level. The goal of the UNDP’s initial support was to enhance the focus on inclusiveness and strengthen the development focus in the Summit. It participated in informal planning meetings convened by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and organised roundtables, Institute@WSIS peer-to-peer training sessions, and publications. It offered fellowships for developing country participation, and some support to strengthen civil society participation and inputs to the Summit. It also provided support at the national level for multi-stakeholder processes and at regional meetings. At the Summit itself, the UNDP supported or co-organised a number of events around the MDGs, knowledge for development, the “digital divide”, and national ICT strategy development.

However, its first major role came with the creation of a Task Force on Financing Mechanisms (TFFM). The Geneva Summit in December 2003 recommended the creation of the task force to the UN secretary-general, following disagreement on the issue of the setting up a Digital Solidarity Fund to finance the bridging of the “digital divide”.

At the request of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the TFFM was coordinated by the UNDP, in cooperation with the World Bank and OECD. It completed its work in December 2004 with the publication of a report entitled *Financing ICTD: A review of trends and an analysis of gaps and promising practices* (ITU, 2004).

Much was at stake for developing countries, which had always looked towards the WSIS as an opportunity to come up with ways to address the huge gaps in ICT availability and accessibility. The report itself was a disappointment to many, its analysis on the whole emphasising the role of market-driven private investment in ICT infrastructure with insufficient consideration of its limitations. Inadequacies in various existing financing mechanisms and gaps in financing were noted and revisions suggested, yet no new financing mechanisms were seen as being required or were suggested. The politically sensitive issue of the Digital Solidarity Fund, set up and supported by a number of Southern countries and local governments of developed countries, was not addressed, although its innovation in leveraging local-government-to-local-government and peer-to-peer support was noted. The rationale offered for its exclusion was based on a narrow interpretation of the TFFM remit – i.e. that only existing mechanisms were to be included – and was unsatisfactory to many (Ó Siochrú, 2005).

Having said this, the report is wide ranging, and in what might be described as a “minority report within the report”, it provides broad support to many innovative ideas such as the “open access” approach to providing infrastructure, ICTs as a public good, and community-driven ICT enterprises. Some of these have been taken up in subsequent UNDP activities in the post-WSIS space, especially in collaboration with civil society actors and networks.

The TFFM was also criticised for the limited opportunities it gave for participation, in terms of both the composition of the task force and its modus operandi. Its selection process was conventional in an environment in which innovation was expected or at least hoped for. Members were selected without wide consultation, comprising two civil society organisations (a number of other non-governmental and Southern actors accepted but ultimately could not participate), four intergovernmental agencies (the UNDP, ITU, OECD and World Bank) and six governments.¹⁷ The two civil society/multi-stakeholder organisations were selected for their strong networks and contributions made on the financing question. While there was outreach and engagement through online and actual consultations,¹⁸ on the whole its deliberations were considered to be less than optimal.

The TFFM is sometimes compared unfavourably against the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), which took up the other major issue to emerge from the Geneva Summit – internet governance – and has been credited with pioneering a broad multi-stakeholder process encompassing a broad interpretation of its remit. Such comparisons may be legitimate, but there were some mitigating factors. The timescale for the TFFM was far more taxing than

17 For the composition at the time of its launch see: <www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/pi1616.doc.htm>.

18 See: <www.itu.int/wsis/tffm>.

16 <www.wsis-online.net>.

that of the WGIG. The instruction from the December 2003 Summit was to complete the report for December 2004 in time to permit review and discussion at the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) from 17 to 25 February 2005, a relatively short time to form the task force, undertake the research and deliver the report, and seven months less than the time available to the WGIG.¹⁹ Furthermore, the level of civil society organisation and understanding around internet governance was considerably higher than that around financing mechanisms, making it easier to integrate their participation.

In Phase 2 of the Summit, the UNDP again supported various events and activities in partnership with the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) and the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) in the context of the Sharing the Future initiative and pavilion.²⁰ Support was also provided to civil society and developing country participants, in particular through the Sharing the Future initiative led by UNDP-Tunis and UNIDO.

Description and analysis of ICT activities

WSIS action line facilitation

Under the Tunis Agenda adopted in December 2005 and the subsequent consultation in February 2006, the UNDP was designated as the moderator for two key action lines from the WSIS Plan of Action, namely C4: Capacity building, and C6: Enabling environment. (The UNDP was also suggested for a secondary facilitating role in action line C7: E-government and in action line C11: International and regional cooperation, both facilitated by UNDESA, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.) Although the UNDP had not actively sought such a prominent role, it is likely that its selection was favoured by some developing countries and actors given its development focus, its operational presence on the ground in each country, and its global networks. A concern at the UNDP was that, unlike UNESCO and the ITU, it lacked (since 2003) a dedicated ICT unit at the headquarters level capable of overseeing the global implementation of action lines. At the meeting confirming the action lines and moderators/facilitators in February 2006, the UNDP representative declared: "For our part, UNDP stands ready to assume the role of a facilitator, but we would like to propose that we focus on a cluster of activities for which we are best suited so that we can contribute effectively to furthering action on selected priority themes within those areas and not find ourselves spread too thin" (Sorgho-Moulinier, 2006).

The UNDP convened follow-up meetings of the two action-line groups for which it was responsible on 11 May 2006, each for half a day. They were among the first of the action-line group meetings, with an open agenda.²¹ Attendance was reasonable at 45 to 60 people

given that these were the first of the action-line meetings to be held over a two-week "information society week" (9-19 May 2006) organised in Geneva. Civil society groups actively participated, as did representatives from the Geneva missions of other UN agencies (e.g. ILO, ITU, UNCTAD, UNESCO), although private sector participation was relatively low.

The question of what could be achieved through the action-line groups was an issue for both the facilitators and stakeholders. There were no new resources and no clear follow-up process to which these could contribute. Prior to the action-line meetings, feedback on how to use the space most effectively had been solicited through the WSIS-implementation website. The caution expressed by the UNDP in February was echoed in some of the inputs to the virtual consultation process and to the outcome of the meetings themselves. Given the lack of additional resources for facilitators to support follow-up activities, and the diffuseness of the action line mandates and their country-based networks, the UNDP's efforts are focused on exploring targeted opportunities, working with the most active participants in order to achieve the greatest impact.

Two possible strands of follow-up are under consideration:

Action line network and activities: Sustaining the action-line teams, and working on common projects virtually and in real time with partners, was identified as a possible way forward. While the ITU has created a web platform for this, to date this strand of networked activity has proved difficult to launch. The UNDP has expressed its willingness to undertake this as a partnership activity, building linkages where feasible with communities of practice established under the Global Alliance for ICT and Development (GAID) – for example, in capacity building, with a community on public and private entrepreneurship led by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and other partners – and with the development dimensions of Internet Governance Forum activities.²²

Selected project ideas and work at the country level: The UNDP is proposing to identify selected themes from WSIS for mainstreaming into their existing work agenda in a partnership format, with active participation from action-line teams, rather than establishing a separate stand-alone WSIS activity. While these themes are being selected, the UNDP is supporting some innovative approaches and mechanisms identified in the TFFM report and in the first action-line meetings, in particular:

- The production of policy briefs on open access policy and capacity dimensions of local ICT access and community-driven network type approaches
- Support to advocacy at the national level by way of mainstreaming ICT into poverty reduction strategies.²³

19 For the timing of the preparatory process see: <www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory2/index.html>.

20 See: <www.globalknowledge.org/wsis2005/index.cfm?menuid=44&parentid=33> and for region specific foci see: <europeandcis.undp.org/?wspc=practice-14_h_19> and <www.apdip.net/news/apdipatwsis>.

21 For a complete list see: <www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/meetings.html>.

22 For UNDP-APDIP support to regional consultations and synthesising of key development-related concerns relating to internet governance through the Open Regional Dialogue on Internet Governance (ORDIG) initiative see: <igov.apdip.net>.

23 This is also in line with a priority area of focus for UNGIS, and through partnership activity with key agencies, it could be linked to UN reform at the national level.

The UNDP is currently supporting project work in these areas, targeted at specific countries and regions, working with civil society organisations and other partners in developing countries.

The next round of action-line group meetings, to be held during 2007, is in the process of being scheduled, and members can interact on the ITU Web Platform.²⁴ The UNDP recognises that sustaining the interest and enthusiasm of these action-line groups represents a challenge.

Separately, various parts of the UNDP have also been involved in supporting WSIS follow-up and stakeholder engagement. For example:

- Its East and Central Europe governance programmes, its Arab States programme (ICTDAR) and its Asia Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP) all have had activities focusing on gender and ICT, often in partnership with other UN agencies and civil society/foundations. APDIP, for instance, recently published a collection of thirteen papers developed for a pre-WSIS seminar, in partnership with UNIFEM and IT for Change.²⁵
- APDIP has also been involved in supporting regional consultations, advocacy and partnerships around internet governance and free and open source software (FOSS).

Other WSIS outcomes and activities

Impact of the WSIS within the UNDP

Given the absence of a separate ICT unit at UNDP headquarters, it comes as little surprise that the impact of the WSIS on the internal organisation and appreciation of ICTs in the UNDP, overall, is slight.

During much of the WSIS period, the position of ICTs within the organisational structure in the UNDP was in flux, and with the arrival of a new administrator in August 2005, UN reform processes, and the development of a new four-year programming framework, the structures and modus operandi of UNDP support has been affected.

However, the WSIS has enabled those dedicated to ICTs within the UNDP to identify priorities not previously on the agenda, as well as new partners in civil society and in developing countries, and to channel them into the internal process of mainstreaming the broader organisational change underway. Issues around financing mechanisms (e.g. assessing policy-supported finance for community-driven models for access and service delivery; deployment of ICT to enhance access to financing mechanisms to address gaps), exploring options on regional bandwidth development, and bottom-up approaches to network development have emerged as follow-up to the TFFM report, and are now a focus of selected UNDP activities. E-governance and support to participatory processes, into which ICT is a mainstreamed activity, are also being supported at the headquarters and regional levels. Current UNDP efforts to relate ICT policy to the MDGs may also be viewed as follow-up to both the Millennium Summit and WSIS processes.

UN Group on the Information Society

The UNDP is active in the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS),²⁶ established in February 2006 by the UN secretary-general to help mainstream WSIS outcomes into the relevant UN bodies and organisations. The UNDP will chair UNGIS during 2008, following the ITU in the first year and UNESCO in 2007. Other UNDP commitments in this regard are:

- To strengthen the integration of ICT in policy/programme instruments – such as the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and poverty reduction strategies – and in country programmes, with a view to improving effectiveness and contributing to the MDGs.
- To commission work on how to support this integration process (e.g. the role of ICT in poverty reduction strategies) and how some of the challenges, such as the “paradigm gap” between development decision-makers and ICT sector policy-makers, can be addressed.
- To undertake high-level advocacy in the context of various global development forums on the role that ICT can play in catalysing economic investment, transparency and accountability, social inclusion and service delivery to more effectively deliver on the MDGs – an objective stressed throughout the WSIS texts.

However, little progress has been recorded in these areas.

Stakeholder participation

As discussed earlier, the UNDP has established various mechanisms and bodies at the institutional level to ensure due consideration to gender issues (the Gender Programme Team, the Gender Thematic Trust Fund, the gender knowledge network and UNIFEM); to Southern participation (its regionalised management structure and rotation, its network of country offices employing 85% of its staff, and its Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries); and to civil society participation (its CSO Division and CSO Advisory Committee, access to funding mechanisms, and national-level focus on multi-stakeholder partnerships). Although it is beyond the scope of this report to assess their ultimate effectiveness, few agencies can boast such a wide-ranging, multi-level set of approaches and depth of commitment.

In relation specifically to ICT, and since it does not comprise one of the UNDP's core areas of activity, the focus on participation comprises a set of operational activities facilitated ultimately by the overall framework above. Examples include the following:

- *Multi-stakeholder engagement in national ICT policy development.* While national e-strategies and policies are viewed as a priority in many countries, their participatory development and implementation are not. In a number of countries and regions, the UNDP supports multi-stakeholder engagement and contribution

24 See sites for C4 and C6 indicated at <www.itu.int/whsis/implementation>.

25 See: <www.apdip.net/projects/gender>.

26 <www.ungis.org>.

to the development of national ICT policy. In a selected few, it is also exploring support to civil society/multi-stakeholder-led advocacy efforts to promote pro-poor development options.

- *Community-based actors in implementation.* Under-served area licenses and universal access funds do not typically allow community actors to access financing for implementation. Nor is there much support for civil society/non-governmental organisation (NGO) inclusion in implementation when it comes to strategies focusing on roll-out of initiatives to increase access and service delivery to under-served areas. With only a few exceptions, roll-out policy and financing typically exclude or make it difficult for local communities, CSOs and NGOs to be part of the solution. The UNDP is supporting action-oriented research and undertaking advocacy into such options and looking to partnerships and working with governments to potentially pilot such approaches.
- *Global governance of the internet and ensuring that there is a strong developing country and stakeholder voice.* Some of the consultative and research activity that UNDP-APDIP is involved in can be viewed as contributing to this outcome.
- *Gender mainstreaming in ICTs.* The UNDP's Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS has published, in collaboration with UNIFEM, a report on *Bridging the Gender Digital Divide* as part of a larger ICTD mainstreaming project (UNDP, 2004b).

The UNDP's focus at the global level has been to bring regional and national consultation processes to bear in those arenas in which it is involved. Within the context of pro-poor ICT policy and implementation support, the goal is to involve civil society as key partners in research and to support a focused inclusion in policy processes as well as in implementation where possible.

Conclusions and recommendations

The UNDP is at a transitional moment in relation to ICT and how it is organisationally integrated within the agency. The mainstreaming of ICT within poverty eradication and democratic governance has distinct advantages and, in principle, can help situate the UNDP in a key position in relation to ICT for development in these critical areas. To be effective, mainstreaming takes time and dialogue, as well as strategic support to ensure that country offices and partners receive appropriate signals and support for the transition. In practice, ICT for development has yet to receive the kind of strategic level support and resources needed to realise the potential of mainstreaming, and this is a significant factor in relation to recent UNDP performance.

Coming from the WSIS, the UNDP agreed to facilitate two major action lines, was assigned a key role in the newly formed UNGIS, and committed itself to following up and mainstreaming ICT into national development strategies and policies.

Given the organisational mainstreaming of ICT and the paucity of resources available centrally to date, the third area is where the UNDP can probably have the greatest impact. In the context of ICT for

poverty reduction and democratic governance, UNDP activities are framed less as a follow-up to WSIS per se – although its activities are supportive of many WSIS action items – than as directly realising a broader set of UN Summit goals, particularly the MDGs, and helping countries and local communities to identify ways in which ICT can be mainstreamed in response to national development imperatives and programme challenges. The focus is thus more on the country level with the global engagement linked to that, rather than on an autonomous global consensus-building activity.

The UNDP's global level approach to action line facilitation, of working with partners to develop some key products rather than building a broad network in the absence of resources to sustain such activity, should be seen in this light. But it might require few resources, in collaboration with the other partners, to improve the potential for coordination across action lines and the participation, for instance, of civil society actors who lack the resources to follow multiple processes. Improved coordination of the several online platforms, and clustering all action-line group meetings around a single period and venue – the idea of an “information society week” – are examples. This requires some commitment and coordination from the key agencies involved, including the ITU, UNESCO, the UNDP and UNDESA.

Looking beyond the WSIS, the relatively low level of broad-based participation by the larger development community in the context of ICT for development, globally but also at the national level, is a critical concern. Advocacy and mechanisms for dialogue are needed to build bridges and facilitate progressive enabling and foundational policy foci regarding such issues as rights, privacy, service delivery, access to information, and participation in democratic decision-making. This may open an opportunity for the UNDP and other actors to identify the post-WSIS spaces at the global, regional and national levels in which these issues can be raised and debated, and to develop appropriate means by which the action lines can fit into these, especially as multi-stakeholder mechanisms capable of incorporating civil society participation and perspectives.

Notwithstanding the limitations to date of ICT resources at the strategic headquarters level, the UNDP is well placed, even beyond the ITU, to take up leading strategic and operational roles in relation to encouraging ICTD integration within the larger development community, and in a manner that facilitates the widest participation. Its core commitment to development, its resident coordination role at national level, its unrivalled network of country offices, and its approach to encouraging broad participation all stand in its favour. Furthermore, the resource issue may soon be eased as a result of recent and significant member state commitments to the ICT Fund.

UNGIS offers a forum for this within the WSIS process. However, the UNDP could also play a part in bringing it to a higher level within the UN system, beyond the WSIS itself.

An opportunity might arise in the context of the report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on UN System-Wide Coherence, which was delivered in November 2006 (UN, 2006). The report has yet to be debated by the UN General Assembly, but includes a call for enhanced coordination. Pilot countries have been

proposed to identify challenges and opportunities. As this process advances, UNGIS in the context of the UN Chief Executives Board and the UNDP, through the Resident Coordinator system at the national level, could take on the task of exploring how to move this process forward in the area of mainstreaming ICT for development.

Adopting such a strategic position for ICT for development would demand significant resource and mainstreaming commitments from the UNDP. The UNDP's new programming framework is under development. It would be useful to see a clear and renewed focus on ICT for development.²⁷ Without it, an opportunity would be lost. ■

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27 The UNDP administrator indicated some awareness of the issues in a press briefing the day after he took up office: "Of course, the other major revolution we are all experiencing, a tremendous breakthrough in communications technology, again opens a lot of doors to a much more effective global development. People can be connected more easily, can market their products, and can access information much more easily. So, if we are able to put all these things together, we really might have a chance to really make poverty history, as this beautiful sentence goes. So to be at the heart of this struggle with colleagues, of course, from all over the world at this moment is terribly exciting." UNDP. *Press Briefing with Kemal Dervis*, 16 August 2005. Available from: <vis-20050816.en" content.undp.org/go/newsroom/august-2005/press-briefing-dervis-20050816.en>.

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