

CANADA

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The Information Society is for every country, every citizen. Digital opportunities provided by Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are fundamental to the improvement of all aspects of developing economies and their entry into the global marketplace. While ICTs are not a panacea for all development problems, they offer enormous opportunities to narrow social and economic inequalities and thus help achieve broader development goals that the international community has set at the UN Millennium Summit. By facilitating the exchange of information and knowledge, by helping deliver education and health services, by stimulating civil society participation in a country's democratic process, and by helping small and large businesses explore new markets, ICTs greatly contribute to global social and economic enrichment.

It is a top priority of the Government of Canada to help developing countries overcome the digital divide as illustrated by the key initiatives announced at the Summit of the Americas in 2001 and the G8 Summits. G8 Heads of State at the Okinawa Summit created the **Digital Opportunity Task (DOT) Force** in July 2000. Chaired by Industry Canada Deputy Minister V. Peter Harder, the DOT Force represented both a unique model of international cooperation and a new way of responding to the challenges of development. The DOT Force brought together committed leaders from government, industry and civil society, drawn from G8 member countries and from the developing world, to conceive a forward-looking action plan designed to expand the use of digital technology and to universalize its benefits. Its report, *Digital Opportunities for All: Meeting the Challenge*, contained a vision of global development based on the power of information technology to promote sustainable growth, advance social justice and strengthen democratic governance.

Above all, the DOT Force has created a series of initiatives aimed at forming the key building blocks of the information society for developing nations. As part of a Canadian package of initiatives in support of the G8 Africa Action Plan and in the context of Canada's leadership role in the work of the DOT Force, three initiatives have been created. Through the Canada Fund for Africa, these Industry Canada-led initiatives address key "ICT for development" areas: national e-strategies and policy frameworks, connectivity and the use and development of local content, and helping African entrepreneurs.

In the DOT Force Plan of Action endorsed by G8 Leaders at the Genoa Summit, a commitment was made to establish an **International e-Development Resource Network (IeDRN)**, designed to marshal global efforts in support of national e-strategies for development. With the participation of government world-wide, international organizations, the private sector, and the not-for-profit community, the IeDRN will establish a focal point for bringing together providers of e-strategy information and expertise with the individuals, organizations and governments that can make effective use of these resources. The initial pilot phase of the IeDRN will consist of national sources of expertise, as well as a regional source, supported by Canada, at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA), where the demand side of "ICT for development" in Africa will be coordinated. These centres will become focal points to disseminate off-the-shelf information to policy and regulatory experts in developing countries. They will also aggregate or funnel the demand for more specific support, at the individual or institutional level.

In addition to planning and co-ordinating the implementation of the IeDRN, Canada has committed \$10 million (CDN) over five years to the establishment of a **Canadian e-Policy Resource Centre (CePRC)** as Canada's specific contribution to the IeDRN. The CePRC will serve as a focal point for the identification and funding of Canadian experts who will provide expertise and mentoring in support of national policy-makers in Africa across a wide range of

ICT policies and strategies in such areas as e-commerce legal and policy frameworks, telecommunications policy and regulation, Internet governance, e-government strategies, and the sharing of program experience in e-health, distance learning and community access.

The CePRC's Secretariat will be established to coordinate government expertise, facilitate knowledge exchange, receive international requests for expertise, identify and consult appropriate partner institutions, and provide overall management and administrative functions of the CePRC. Resources will be offered, on a cost-recovery basis, by various government departments and agencies, non-government organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

The Canadian government is providing \$12 million (CDN) to launch **Connectivity Africa** to promote connectivity, increase access and support the creation of local content and applications in Africa. While community-based projects will be launched with the support of Canadian experts, an awareness raising campaign will target decision-makers in Africa to facilitate connectivity across social sectors. Connectivity Africa will be incubated at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for a period of three years. Through its Acacia program, IDRC will co-invest in Connectivity Africa. The programs of Connectivity Africa and Acacia will be "twinned" to engender greater impact and efficiency. In 2005, the initiative will become an independent and self-sustained African entity through the partnerships that will be established during the incubation period. A strategic advisory board will include membership from a wide range of African organizations, such as the UN ECA, the African Development Bank, the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Commission; Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEOMA), Common Market for Eastern and South Africa (COMESA), and the Arab Planning Institute.

Connectivity Africa will operate as a network developed from the ground up, based on local demand from African partners. The program will support research, development and innovative uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs)¹. Connectivity Africa staff will engage African institutions to develop and fund projects under the following four program areas:

- *Innovation in the Use of ICTs*: will focus on emerging information and communication technologies that may have application in the African context, in particular, innovations for low-cost, robust ICT access in rural and urban areas;
- *African Regional ICT Futures* will consist of projects designed to help connect national strategies with regional infrastructure priorities and seek to support the development of intra-regional connectivity throughout the African continent;
- *R&D in African ICTs* will focus on projects that build capacity in African institutions for innovation and research in the area of ICTs. In particular, it will support the development of an African *observatoire* on the diffusion and use of ICTs in Africa;
- *Partnership and Convergence* will promote organization, electronic networking and information sharing among existing and new programs, practitioners, researchers and participants involved with ICTs for development in Africa. It will also develop co-ordination mechanisms with all donors involved with African ICT for development

Linked to Connectivity Africa is another \$3 million (CDN) DOT Force initiative, the **Open Knowledge Network (OKN)**, which is being developed under the chairmanship of OneWorld International, with initial support from the UK Government. Local content development is closely tied to human development, and the ultimately goal of the OKN is the

¹ Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) is the term given to define the sector encompassing all converging technologies that carry information—it includes traditional telecommunications, informatics, broadcasting (radio and TV), cable television, multimedia Internet, Geographic Information Systems, etc.

empowerment of local communities. To this end, the OKN aims to promote the creation and exchange of local content as widely as possible, based on a pilot project launched in India in early 2003.

Enablis (formerly the DOT Force Entrepreneurial Network) consists of a coalition of public, private and civil society organizations co-led by Telesystem Ltd. (Canada), Accenture (UK) and Hewlett-Packard (US) aimed at helping small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs in developing countries to leverage the power of ICTs for social and economic development. Through an initial \$10 Million (CDN) over five years contribution from the Government of Canada, Enablis will encourage governments and entrepreneur support organisations (ESOs), including aid agencies and multilateral organisations and other NGOs and third parties, to take up the advantages of ICT-related entrepreneurship in pursuing sustainable social and economic development. It will also serve as a point of reference and expertise in the ICT/entrepreneurship area. The Canadian contribution to Enablis will be matched equally or better by private sector firms, with a view to focus on entrepreneurship development in African countries.

Enablis will focus primarily on entrepreneurial users of ICT with a high potential transformational impact in African and other developing countries. Examples include those that promote better functioning of a local market, better access to local and global markets, set an example of how best to use ICTs to improve their internal efficiency and effectiveness, reduce costs of ownership of ICTs or the development of fulfilment infrastructure for ICT-enabled businesses.

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