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CUBA CONTRIBUTION

"Measuring the impact of ICT for Development"

*The views presented here are the participants’ and do not necessarily reflect the views and the position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development*
Cuba’s contribution on Measuring the impact of ICT for Development.

The development of the Information and communications technologies provides tremendous opportunities, but also significant challenges to developing countries.

They have the potential to provide new solutions to development challenges, particularly in the context of globalization, and can foster economic growth, competitiveness, access to information and knowledge, poverty eradication and social inclusion that will help to expedite the integration of all countries, especially developing countries, in particular least developed countries into the global economy.

That is why there is a pressing need to address the major impediments that developing countries face in accessing the new technologies, such as insufficient resources, infrastructure, education, capacity, investment and connectivity and issues related to technology ownership, standards and flows, and in this regard calls upon all stakeholders to provide adequate resources, enhanced capacity-building and technology transfer, on mutually agreed terms, to developing countries, particularly the least developed countries.

The current international economic order, whose pernicious impact has been intensified by the effects of the neoliberal globalization, makes it impossible to overcome the digital divide that grows and deepens the inequality and polarization of welfare and poverty.

In recent years considerable progress has been made in access to information and communications technologies, including the steady increase in Internet access to nearly one quarter of the world population, the expanding penetration of cellular telephony and the availability of multilingual content and Internet addresses. Nevertheless, the benefits of these new technologies are not available to all, since while in developed countries 60% of the population has internet access, in developing countries only accede 18% of the inhabitants. This figure drops to 11% for the African continent.

On the other hand, the comparison of the investment in Research and Development (R & D) between developed and developing countries show a very negative picture. While in the first ones the expenditure on R & D reached values between 2% and 3.6% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in Latin America and the Caribbean do not surpass 0.6%. For every million inhabitants, the OECD countries spend 32 times more than the region in research and development, its production of scientific articles is 18 times greater and the number of patent applications is nearly 80 times higher.
In Latin America and the Caribbean the public sector remains the largest contributor to the financing of investment in R & D, contributing on average more than 50% of the total. Conversely, in developed economies is the private sector the principal agent in the financing and implementation of activities in science, technology and innovation. For example, in the U.S. this sector contributes over 65%.

This distribution of R & D expenditure between public and private sources in developing countries may be interpreted not as a high participation of the public spending but big part of the problem resides in the low level of commitment to innovation of the enterprise sector.

And it is not only a question of insufficient financial resources, Latin America and the Caribbean also lags with the human resources involved in the activities of science and technology which is still insufficient to trigger the required transformations.

It is necessary to highlight the important role of Governments in the design of public policies in the provision of public services responsive to national needs and priorities through, inter alia, the effective use of information and communications technologies, including on the basis of a multi-stakeholder approach, to support national development efforts.

The evidence that the lack of financial resources remains a major obstacle to the development of nations of the South is indisputable. This was recently recognized during the debates of the recent High Level Plenary Meeting on Millennium Development Goals, where it was demonstrated, once again, the breaches of the financial commitments of the developed countries, and the negative impact that it causes in the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the modest Millennium Development Goals.

The efforts of developing countries in mobilizing domestic resources to finance its development programs is hampered further by the existence of international financial and economic mechanisms that establish the financial flows in favor of the developed countries thus thwarting any attempt to increase its net external income. An example of this is the international interconnection charges to Internet.

It is necessary to emphasize that the mobilization of domestic resources alone is not sufficient for the investment in new technologies that are needed in developing countries.

To complement national efforts, there is a need for the relevant international and regional institutions, as well as appropriate institutions in source countries, to increase their support for private foreign investment in infrastructure development and other priority areas, including projects to bridge the digital divide in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.
But the private foreign investment alone cannot be the answer to the development needs, nor replace the essential role that the official development assistance (ODA) plays, as a complement to other sources of financing for development, in facilitating the achievement of development objectives, including the internationally agreed development goals, in particular the Millennium Development Goals.

The net total Official Development Assistance (ODA) from donors belonging to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) fell by about 3% in 2009 compared to the previous year. In 2008, the ODA amounted to 122.3 billion dollars, while in 2009 it was 119.6 billion dollars. This amount represented 0.31% of the Gross National Income (GNI) combined of DAC members in 2009.

Even in the middle of the global crisis, Cuba has made significant achievements in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and continues to get results in education and health, equal to that of developed countries, and in some cases higher. This is confirmed by a recent study by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), which gives Cuba the first place in the Americas and the sixth worldwide in preparing the population for the use of ICT.

This success has been achieved despite that the development of these technologies has been significantly affected by the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the U.S. government, which has led, up to the year 2010, losses to the national economy in excess of 700 billion dollars and in the order of 4 thousand 300 million dollars in the telecommunications sector.

In the case of the information and communications technologies, the blockade has been directed to impede Cuba the acquisition of advanced technologies and systems and prevent the country's access to numerous Internet sites and services.

Recommendations:

Cuba reiterates the following recommendations which we believe should be part of the immediate actions:

- Recognize the need to provide new and additional resources to developing countries, particularly in the current situation in which underdeveloped countries are forced to spend significant amounts of resources to address the current economic and financial crisis and its disastrous consequences for their prospects for progress.

- Call on those developed countries that have not yet done so to fulfill the commitment to assign 0.7% of GNP for official development assistance (ODA). This assistance should be granted without conditions and respecting the national priorities and development strategies.

- Advocate for a multilateral ICT commercial system that is fair, equitable, and implemented in a non-discriminatory, inclusive and transparent way, and that it benefits all countries, especially developing countries.
• Recommend the establishment of a tariff system and payments of the international interconnections to Internet that protect the small players and that includes a preferential treatment to the developing countries, which allow to generate capital and to prevent its flight, so that the income of the ICT sector can be used in infrastructure investments.

• Advocate that the multilateral governance mechanisms and the standardization bodies of ICT and global networks be more democratic, fair and coherent, and with an effective participation of the developing countries.

• Strengthen the coordination of the United Nations system and all other multilateral financial, trade and development institutions to support economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development worldwide.

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