The Private Sector on the ‘Digital Divide’

To what extent is the private sector able to pool the requested resources to bridge the telecom infrastructure divide, especially in the poorest countries? Are the private and public sectors really willing to work together for development purposes? How can public-private partnerships be built and what kind of difference can they make in the global development agenda?

In this issue of the eXchange we have tried to find out more about the current private-public policy debate, wondering what we can realistically expect from public-private sector cooperation for broad development purposes. Vernon Ellis, International Chairman of Accenture and Christine Hemrick, Vice President, Strategic Technology Policy from Cisco Systems, have kindly accepted to share their views with the eXchange on this topic.

Can ICTs Help Fight Child Poverty and Abuse?

ICTs are often presented as a threat to child safety. Certainly, there is broad awareness of the dangerous implications regarding the use of the Internet for the distributing of child pornography and other forms of cybercrime. It is also quite evident, however, that today there is limited knowledge about how ICTs may help fight child poverty and abuse.

In this issue of the eXchange we discuss if and how technology may help address these issues.

In this special report, we also meet with Kidlink - an educational initiative connecting children all over the world - to learn about their activities in Brazil and how they are helping educating children from poor communities.

This issue of the eXchange is dedicated to all those who are committed every day in helping children live a life free from violence and abuse. Our hope is that we may somehow foster new ideas, resources, and project capacity within the development community, in a field in which ICTs can help do more.

In this Issue: What the Private Sector can do for Development - eXchange meets with Vernon Ellis – Cisco talks about Partnership – the DOT Force at the G8 Summit in Genoa – ICTs and the Children – infoDev supports Kidlink in Brazil – infoDev is...

“infoDev promotes innovative projects on the use of information and communication technologies for economic and social development, with a special emphasis on the needs of the poor in developing economies.”
Exactly one year ago the eXchange interviewed Bruno Lanvin – then Executive Secretary of the Digital Opportunity Task Force (Dot Force) - to know more about this initiative. The Dot Force was created by the G8 Heads of State at their Kyushu-Okinawa Summit in July 2000 to set up a strategy to integrate the multiple international efforts to bridge the digital divide.

During the last twelve months, the Dot Force brought together forty three teams from government, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and international organizations, representing both developed and developing countries, in a cooperative effort to identify ways in which the digital revolution can benefit all the world’s people, especially the poorest and most marginalized groups.

This complex consultation process brought to the creation of a report and a plan of action, presented during the G8 Summit in Genoa, on July 21, 2001.

‘Digital Opportunities for All: Meeting the Challenge’ is the title of the Dot Force Report, which was fully endorsed by the G8 Leaders in their Final Communiqué following the Genoa Summit, last July.

In its thirty-two pages, the report highlights the need to ‘think differently and act cohesively’ in order to face the challenge of creating digital opportunities for all. Yet there is broad consensus on the benefits the ICT revolution can bring to improve the lives of poor people, efforts still do not realize their full potential. A main difficulty is that existing development efforts remain limited to traditional cooperation approaches.

In its one-year work, the task force not only focused on the causes and effects of the digital divide, but also proposed some priority actions which were incorporated in the proposed Genoa Plan of Action. The proposed plan is composed of nine action points, addressing several needs, including:

- help establish and support developing country national e-strategies, improve connectivity,
- increase access and lower costs,
- enhance human capacity,
- foster entrepreneurship for sustainable development,
- support to universal participation in key ICT policy and technical decision processes,
- the establishment of dedicated e-inclusion initiatives,
- use of ICT for health care and to fight HIV/AIDS,
- creation of local content and ICT applications, and
- prioritization of ICT in G8 and other development assistance policies.

After having fulfilled the Okinawa mandate, the Dot Force will proceed towards the Genoa follow-up process.

The Italian Ministry for Innovation and Technologies will lead the works of the Presidency of the Dot Force, to mark the commitment to a successful follow-up to the Genoa Action Plan till the end of December, in tight coordination with the Canadian government.

The next steps of the ‘after-Genoa’ consultations will be discussed during a meeting in Canada, in October 2001, and in a plenary meeting in Rome, in November 2001.
What the Private Sector Can Do For Development

Investing in Developing Economies

Over the last few decades, a growing recognition of the role of the private sector for economic development has been observed, and increasing efforts to create private investment-friendly environments have been made to attract private direct investments in developing countries.

The telecommunications sector has traditionally been among the most appealing sectors for private investments and - at the appropriate market conditions - able to attract considerable flows of foreign direct investments in developing countries.

Information technology and, in general, the emergence of the 'new economy' have created an unprecedented wave of private investments and growth opportunities.

The impact in terms of growth, employment, and wealth creation has been remarkable all over the world, including in emerging and high risk economies. Then the crisis arrived, and along with the sinking dreams of the new economy, the ghost of an unbearable burden of debt - estimated over 650 billion US dollars - on global telecommunications companies.

The collapse of telecommunications and technology equity markets, a shrinking pool of global investment capital for innovation, and a number of failed privatizations, has induced lower tolerances for risk and reduced private sector-led infrastructure investments in emerging markets.

The 'Telecommunications Crash' and the Digital Divide

Along with the debate on the 'digital divide', many started wondering if the development models pursued so far are really sustainable, and what role the private sector should play in the years to come.

The debate on how to mitigate the impact of lower investments in emerging countries following the 'new economy' fall down is still open. In this scenario, 'private-public partnerships' seem to be a winning formula to address the divide challenge.

Public-Private Partnerships

The World Bank Group is increasingly interested in using private sector partnerships to maximize the public good effects of private sector investment activities.

infoDev has pioneered the idea of partnering with the private sector, recognizing that the private sector is instrumental to its long-term success. Companies offer familiarity with the rapidly evolving technologies, knowledge of the markets and financial resources. For its part, infoDev provides a forum and means for market and business development, and plays an instrumental role in piloting innovative ways to improve the human resources side of development - ensuring a skilled work force in emerging economies.

In this issue of the eXchange we have tried to explore how public-private partnerships work, and what are the lessons learned by those who have implemented them. We also wanted to investigate the private sector's view of the digital divide, and what companies generally expect from partnering with the public sector.

Last but not least, we tried to discuss the main challenges regarding the chances to bridge the digital divide during an overall ICT sector crisis.

Christine Hemrick, Vice President, Strategic Technology Policy of Cisco Systems, and Vernon Ellis, International Chairman of Accenture, have been our very welcome guests in this debate.
eXchange meets with Vernon Ellis

In this interview with the eXchange, Vernon Ellis, International Chairman of Accenture, tells us about the experience of Accenture in public-private cooperation, and about the group’s commitment in pushing the ICT development agenda in emerging economies.

Accenture seems to be particularly committed in addressing the “digital divide” issue. The participation in the Dot Force as a private sector representative, and the launch of the Digital Opportunities Initiative – in partnership with the Markle Foundation and UNDP - demonstrate this effort. Why is Accenture so committed in addressing the divide issue?

In addition to the Digital Opportunity Initiative and the Dot Force, Accenture has also been active in the World Economic Forum (WEF) Digital Divide Task Force, relevant work in the Global Business Dialogue on eCommerce and, in related areas of work for the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum. We are working in many local programs that aim to create digital opportunities in countries across the world.

One reason we choose to be involved in all this is that it is in our long-term interest. Accenture has offices in forty-six countries in the world, and those countries cover ninety-eight percent of current global GDP. Accelerated development in the rest of the world will ultimately expand the size of the markets we can hope to serve.

More broadly, this set of development issues also represents an excellent opportunity to further our mission to make a difference in the way the world works and lives. Too often in recent years global business has allowed itself to appear remote, unaccountable, and blind to its impact on local communities and world society. At Accenture we have understood for some years that business must do more to recognize its interdependence with wider society, and that if global corporations wish to remain free to generate the many benefits which they can undoubtedly bring – such as increased business efficiency; rising prosperity for many; greater knowledge and awareness of different cultures - then those corporations must also place a significant emphasis on disseminating and sharing these benefits with people who have so far been left behind.

Tackling the challenge of the digital divide – one of the most complex challenges facing the global community - is a good fit for Accenture because of our global reach and broad experience in both strategy formulation and practical implementation. Through our work with the world’s leading organizations, we daily see the value and learning that can be enabled by information and communication technologies. It’s also a subject that is increasingly important to our global team of 75,000 professionals as well as for many of our clients and possible future clients.
How is Accenture practically involved in these initiatives, and what are the main lessons learned so far?

When the Digital Opportunities Task Force was formed at last year’s G8 meeting, protesters marked the occasion by burning computers on the streets of Okinawa. They saw a simple trade-off between computers and development needs. We wanted to gather hard evidence on whether or not that trade-off existed, and how digital development could play a role in wider development. We also aimed to work closely with the rest of the Dot Force to identify a well thought through, strategy which would better direct our own efforts, allow us to co-ordinate with other companies and other sectors, and help mobilize more support amongst the wider communities.

Working on the Dot Force - which is both an inter-governmental and a cross-sector project - has been an interesting experience. Too often in the past each party has stayed in its own silo, unwilling or unable to see areas of mutual interest where much more could be achieved by working together. Certainly each sector involved in the Dot Force had to adjust to others’ perspectives and working styles, and to put aside preconceptions about other people’s positions. But I was particularly struck by the great spirit of co-operation among all those involved - governments, both G8 and developing, civil society, the business sector and the multilaterals - and their determination to bring about real change.

We contributed to the work of the Dot Force via plenary sessions amongst all parties, but also of course by discussion amongst the UK delegation and taking observer status in the consultation exercises organized by the other sectors, and particularly among civil society organizations. For me this was particularly useful in demonstrating the wide range of work already underway, and the particular role that civil society organizations can play in championing local community needs which are unlikely to be picked up by government or fulfilled by the market for many years to come. We also worked closely with the other private sector representatives to establish and build on a common belief in market oriented, demand driven and self sustaining initiatives.

We set up the Digital Opportunities Initiative (DOI) to maximize the effectiveness of our work in support of the Dot Force. The DOI was intended to provide well researched strategic thinking on ICT and Development which embodied the perspectives of the private, multilateral and civil society organizations taking part and to help set direction for future cross sectoral projects in this area.

The DOI research team conducted a comprehensive survey of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) initiatives around the world. Our research focused on community development needs such as health, education, economic opportunity, empowerment and participation, and environmental sustainability.

They concluded that the issue is not about a trade-off between technology and health or education, but an understanding that these go hand and hand. Studying a variety of projects gave some clearly applicable, general lessons. Organizations supporting specific initiatives should be explicit about their development goals. Initiatives should reflect local needs and local conditions, be sustainable, participatory, and well coordinated. The well known Grameen Village Pay Phones initiative - which aims to reduce poverty through the economic empowerment of women in rural Bangladesh - is a very good example which has been highly successful in all these terms and serves as a model for community development.

But in addition to research on specific ICT interventions, we also researched national approaches to ICT and the implications for development outcomes. The goal was to understand how countries are using ICT to advance national objectives, and to identify innovative solutions to common barriers. In particular we aimed to understand some of the complex dynamics relating ICT to devel-
development, and looked for opportunities to generate sustained growth.

At the national level, countries have pursued diverse strategies: some have focused on developing ICT as an economic sector - either to boost exports or to build domestic capacity - while others are focused on deploying ICT as an enabler of wider social and economic development. While the research clearly demonstrates that there are no "one-size-fits-all" solutions for using ICT for development, there are important lessons to be learned. Technology by itself is clearly not enough: it can only help bring about sustainable development if the other fundamentals are also right. Our research points strongly to five fundamentals: infrastructure; policy; education and training; local relevance; and, above all, entrepreneurship. These are the five pillars of sustainable ICT development. And while some results can be been achieved by addressing any one of them alone, the impact is magnified with every extra pillar which is included in an holistic program.

Of course these programs need to be practical too. For example, the first pillar, infrastructure, is undoubtedly important. Without a basic communications infrastructure progress is hard and slow. But this cannot just be about communications backbones or wiring everyone to a personal computer - an expensive futility in countries where literacy rates are low. In such conditions, direct access to a telephone is more valuable than access to the Internet. In many developing countries public or community access centers have a key role to play.

We need to be equally realistic in regard to the second pillar - the need to get the overall policy environment right. Take, for example, the question of liberalizing telecommunications markets, which in many developing countries are state monopolies. This often raises the need to balance several competing objectives, such as securing incentives for investment and the entry of new operators, while at the same time encouraging universal access and preventing too much erosion of government revenues.

In education and training, the third pillar, simply providing computers without the training to use them is a surefire formula for disaster. Basic literacy and numeracy are of course important. But it is crucial to ensure a core of knowledge workers: people with the technical capabilities to maintain ICT infrastructure and adapt it to local requirements.

A focus on locally relevant content provides the fourth pillar. After all it is useless building elaborate Internet networks or providing computers if the only software and content available is that designed for people living thousands of miles away. As I have said, I think that NGOs often have a particular role here.

The fifth - and for me the key - element is entrepreneurship. This is a subject we care passionately about, having just published a major study on it. It is vital for sustainable development, providing the engine for economic growth and generating the revenue to pay for social goals.

All of this work confirmed me in my belief that ICT can only enable sustainable development if it is part of an holistic long-term approach, in which business works co-operatively with other parts of society - especially government and civil society. These partners will need to work together on a program which addresses the 5 pillars of development. The Dot Force report establishes just such a program.

Provided it is seen through to implementation, I believe it will make a significant difference. And I believe there is a good chance of that happening. Certainly I and my private sector colleagues on the Dot Force have offered real resources and real management commitment to turn this program into a reality.

The role of public-private partnerships is broadly recognized, but there are not so many of them today: the Digital Opportunities Initiative and infoDev are 'exceptions' rather than the rule. From your perspective of private sector organization, what are the main challenges still to be met to increase private sector involvement in addressing broad development issues, such as the digital divide?
What’s needed is more clarity, more long term thinking and a more sophisticated approach from all sides. The result would be greater recognition of opportunities for each sector to benefit from common programs, and sometimes a closer, harder edged focus on the mutual benefits to be achieved and the timescale and conditions for achieving them.

Certainly the private sector needs to become more sophisticated in recognizing its own self interests. We don’t have to accept all the criticisms made by protestors to recognize that there is still too great an element of truth in their charges that global capitalism has been blind to its casualties, deaf to social and environmental concerns, sometimes party to imposing “unfair” terms of trade on poor countries, supporting liberalization of their markets while industrialized countries continue to protect many of their own. The result is less development, fewer and smaller markets in which to sell, and growing pressure against the global trading system.

Some have responded to this by increases in charitable giving, conducting social and community audits of their activities, or engaging in shorter term partnerships with civil society or government. These approaches are fine as far as they go. However, their value can be weakened if they are too vague or inadequately integrated into the core values and objectives of business. This makes it too easy for critics to reject them as PR spin and for shareholders to reject them as pure costs which are unsustainable in the longer term.

Instead we need to focus on programs which really do recognize and take account of the interdependence of companies and society. These programs need to focus on activities which are sustainable, make good use of business strengths, and which add value to business operations. For example many companies operating in less developed countries find it difficult to operate efficiently because of a lack of adequate skills and training in the local community. Rather than continuously import skills – or worse services – from abroad, it can be more effective in the longer term for a company to work together with the community to train people and then employ them locally.

If this approach is to work then governments, multilaterals and civil society organizations have to reciprocate, recognizing that it is not only legitimate but also desirable for companies to gain long term benefits from public-private partnerships, being forthright about the benefits which they are seeking from the partnership, maintaining a long term perspective themselves and giving a very high priority to sticking to bargains once they have been struck.

But I don’t think we should be too pessimistic about what is happening already in this area. Although there are fewer public-private partnerships than I would like to see, I think we should recognize good work already being done by companies like Hewlett Packard, BP and CISCO to name just a few, and the many smaller scale and more local efforts such as the Ikageng project in South Africa in which I understand the World Bank is participating.

And I think the longer term trends are favorable. Taking the experience of the Dot Force as an example, compared with what might have happened only a few years ago, there was far less suspicion from G8 governments and the non-profit organizations that the private sector was only out to grab subsidies for large-scale infrastructure projects. Perhaps the biggest shift in attitudes was among developing-country governments. Initially suspicious of the process, they were gradually reassured that it would not – after all – turn into yet another attempt by Western governments and companies to gain unfettered and unreciprocated access to their markets.

Perhaps one of the most constructive steps we can take to improve the climate for public-private partnerships is to work together in this spirit to implement the Dot Force program successFully and to make sure the benefits achieved are understood by all.
Cisco supports several initiatives aimed at fostering development by the use of ICT. In this interview with the eXchange, Christine Hemrick, Vice President, Strategic Technology Policy of Cisco Systems, presents Cisco’s approach to development and the most meaningful ICT training initiatives the company is promoting in developing countries, including a project in cooperation with UNECA and infoDev.

Netaid.org and the training initiatives of the Cisco Networking Academy are meaningful examples of the commitment of Cisco in the development arena. Why is Cisco so involved in this type of activities which are rather unusual for a private group?

Cisco’s leaders and employees have always believed in the importance of participating in the community, including the Global Community. We believe particularly strongly in the value of education which empowers individuals as well as strengthening societies. We’ve invested very heavily in the Cisco Networking Academy Program, which now reaches to 133 countries, including 28 of the least developed countries.

We’ve focused on the Networking Academy program for a couple of reasons. First, it trains students in a badly needed set of ICT skills - that is, the ability to design, implement, and operate computer networks. All countries need people with these skills in order to increase their productivity through the use of ICT and thus grow their economies. Second, the Networking Academy program actually uses the Internet and ICT to accomplish this training in a timely and highly scalable way. It is a very successful example of how the Internet and ICT can be used to advance education and training. In fact, it’s a “living laboratory” for online education which has taught us and others a great deal about what works and what doesn’t work, and inspired many new ideas for the future. Our passion for education is also evidenced in our support for projects in Africa and India through NetAid’s Global Schoolhouse Project.

While programs like the Networking Academies are completely non-profit, they still return value to Cisco’s customers and investors because they contribute to stronger societies and economies. By empowering people with valuable ICT skills, we lay the foundation for the further growth of the Internet and ICT. And by expanding education and pioneering more effective and productive methods of education and training, we create an environment that is better for individuals, for communities and for businesses, including ours.

In your development activities you probably have to work with different kinds of organizations, including governments, NGOs, and multilateral organizations. How is your role perceived within the development community and what kind of problems do you generally have to face?

The first challenge is always to build mutual trust. Public sector organizations must maintain a balance in their relationships with the private sector. They don’t want to be perceived as unfairly favoring some companies over others, or as interfering with the free market. They want to make sure that their constituents benefit in both the long run as well as the short run, by programs delivered by public-private partnerships. We understand these concerns and support them.

Another challenge is the different speed at which public and private organizations typically operate. Cisco often refers to its pace of operations as running on “Internet time” — our company has grown up in a market where investors demand short term results and customers require a new generation of technology every year. Public sector partners sometimes think that our time targets are unrealistic. But we’ve found that public sector or-
organizations too can learn to operate more in "Internet time" and still be consistent with their own organizational values.

The thing that should be emphasized is that despite the challenges and "cultural" differences, public sector-private sector partnerships can work and be very successful. We feel that we have built some excellent partnerships that have delivered measurable results.

Partnerships are considered 'key' for development initiatives, especially in the ICT sector. In your experience, what are the success factors that should be considered in building public-private cooperation programs?

Like any type of relationship, many elements are important to success. I think there are three that are especially critical. The first is to establish and maintain constant, open communication. Communication builds the mutual trust it keeps the execution on track, and uncovers and deals with the inevitable problems early, when they can be resolved most easily. The second is to focus on common values and goals. The partners' goals will rarely align 100 percent. But it's important to identify the agendas, eliminate any contradictions, and stay focused on a shared definition of success. Thirdly, partners should have core competences and skills that complement each other. For example, Cisco is a technology leader with expertise in on-line learning systems. But we are not experts in economic development.

Taking the Networking Academy program to the least developed countries and helping countries integrate that type of ICT training to the benefit of their development strategies was a goal that neither Cisco nor a development agency could easily achieve alone. But it was a natural partnership opportunity, and that is a goal we are jointly pursuing.

Cisco is currently developing a training project for women in Africa, in cooperation with UNECA and infoDev. Can you tell our readers more about this initiative?

One of the worldwide challenges in ICT is creating opportunities for women and preparing them to succeed in ICT careers. Today, around twenty percent of all students in the Cisco Networking Academies are women. We are always looking for strategies to increase that number. infoDev and UNECA are partnering with us in a very innovative program that is based at ECA's Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA) located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Female students from all over Africa have been selected to attend a residential program that will follow the established Networking Academy curriculum in an accelerated time frame. Through the ECA African Centre for Women and the ITCA, the course participants will also take part in training on gender and development, entrepreneurship and management for African women, and instruction in Africa awareness. Upon completion of this program, the women will return to their home countries with the opportunity to enter professional jobs or to establish their own businesses in the new economy. We also expect them to become role models for other African women and ultimately to be leaders in ICT in their home countries.

The first twenty-six students have already begun their training in Addis Ababa. Next year, twenty-six more will enter the program. This program would not have been possible without infoDev's funding and support.

We hope to engage partnerships to do more programs, similar to the model of this program with infoDev and UNECA. There is a substantial investment that has already been made to build the infrastructure for the Networking Academy program. There is tremendous leverage and efficiency in using it as a platform around which to build comprehensive educational and professional programs that are suited to the particular needs of specific countries, communities or populations.

Christine Hemrick is Vice President, Strategic Technology Policy of Cisco Systems.
ICTs are often presented as a threat for child safety. It is broadly accepted that the Internet is a medium with potentially dangerous uses such as the distribution of child pornography or the engagement of children in other criminal activities. However, if properly used, ICT might be very useful to help fight child poverty and abuse and to enhance children's health and education among other laudable applications.

On September 19-21, 2001, more than 70 Heads of State, hundreds of children, and thousands of other delegates were expected to meet at the United Nations complex in New York City to attend a very special event: the UN Special Session on Children. The summit was postponed, due to the tragic events occurred on September 11th.

The meeting was going to review global progress of the conditions of the children in the world since 1990, and to set development goals for the decade ahead. A UN report released earlier in the summer showed that many of the goals set at the 1990 World Summit for Children have not been fully achieved, and that an immense amount of work still needs to be done.

As a matter of fact, the statistics are appalling (source: UNICEF): Globally, an estimated 12 million children under the age of five still die every year, mostly of easily preventable causes.

Some 130 million children in developing countries are not in primary school; the majority of them are girls. About 160 million children are severely or moderately malnourished. Some 1.4 billion people lack access to safe water and 2.7 billion lack adequate sanitation. Children are the most vulnerable population to the consequences of poor quality of water and poor sanitation.

Some states are moving toward increasingly punitive systems of juvenile justice, with children beaten and arbitrarily detained by police and forced to share prisons with adults in inhumane conditions.

Many unwanted children languish in orphanages and other institutions, denied education and adequate health care. These children are often physically abused.

An estimated 250 million children are engaged in some form of labor.

Armed conflicts around the globe continue to shorten and ruin the lives of millions of children. Last year, about 300,000 children served as soldiers in national armies. Many of these children were killed or maimed in combat; and many children were forced to kill and maim others.

HIV/AIDS, which has already orphaned millions of children and afflicts thousands more every day, threaten to reverse hard-won progress in healthcare and other social gains in a number of countries.

Millions of children around the world are sexually abused, or forced into prostitution. In a recent study, published by the University of Pennsylvania some 325,000 victims of sexual exploitation have been estimated, and this is just in the United States. In Thailand, an estimated 800,000 commercial sex workers are under twenty years of age. Of these, one quarter are below 14 years old and approximately three in every ten are affected by HIV. In Brazil, the estimates of sex workers range from 500,000 to two million.

Child selling and trafficking is far from being fought. Approximately 5,000 to 7,000 Nepali girls are trafficked across the border from Nepal to India every year, most ending up as sex workers in New Delhi or Bombay.

Projections regarding the international development framework are not encouraging – and the recent terrorist attack against the United States will certainly have an impact on the world economy. “We have seen the human toll the recent attacks wrought in the US, with citizens from some eighty nations perishing in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania,” recently said World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn. “But there is another human toll that is largely unseen and one that will be felt in all parts of the developing world, especially Africa. We estimate that tens of thousands more children will die worldwide and some ten
million more people are likely to be living below the poverty line of $1 a day because of the terrorist attacks. This is simply from loss of income. Many, many more people will be thrown into poverty if development strategies are disrupted.”

The Regulatory Framework

The international community has been fighting against child poverty and abuse for years.

The regulatory framework – and the enforcement of the national legislations in each country – plays a fundamental role in this battle.

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child was a stepping stone in putting together a single legal instrument approved by the international community specifically focused to the protection of the rights to which every child is entitled. The Convention reflects a global consensus and in a very short period of time it has become the most widely accepted human rights treaty ever. It has been ratified by 191 countries – the United States and Somalia are the only countries in the UN organization whose ratification is still pending. Two optional protocols were also adopted by the UN General Assembly in May 2000, regarding respectively – Children’s involvement in armed conflict, and child sale, child prostitution and child pornography. By ratifying the Conventions, countries commit under taking all legislative, administrative and social measures for the implementation of the rights recognized. The monitoring of the enforcement of such measures at national level is made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, an internationally-elected body of experts appointed by the United Nations Organization.

Despite the comprehensive body of international and national legislation, the enforcement of children’s rights is still a challenge in many countries.

According to a study published by the South African Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, countries which have taken the lead in developing formal child protective programs are those in which the basic survival needs of the population are generally met, and comprehensive health and welfare systems are in place. Developing countries often tend to incorporate many of the approaches used in first world countries into their own legislations. However, a proportionate allocation of resources needed to sustain these approaches is generally unavailable.

ICT and Children Welfare

There is broad consensus that adequate legislation must be accompanied by actions aiming to provide a global framework of poverty eradication.

Despite the concerns aroused by the distribution of child pornography through the Internet, Information and Communication Technology play an increasingly important role in supporting effectively and efficiently the implementation of development projects in many sectors. ICT can substantially increase the impact of projects that directly or indirectly affect the lives of children, including nutrition, health care, education, and the environment. Thus, not surprisingly, the levels of investment in ICT infrastructure in development projects is growing. Although it is yet far from the levels needed, two strong reasons might accelerate this process. On one hand, it has become clearly evident that ICT help decrease the costs and optimize the process of service delivery, empowering social networks protecting the most vulnerable segments of the population, specially the children, and allowing the dissemination of the voices of the poor. On the other hand, the growing concerns about the digital divide are now at the top of the political agenda in most countries.

ICT and International Prevention of Children Abuse

Relevant efforts have been made on the side of prevention. Effective communication can play an important role in raising awareness of children’s rights, and about how to prevent the spreading of illnesses such as HIV/AIDS.

ICTs may also increase the effectiveness of intelligence activities aimed at detecting violations of national and international laws, including organized networks involved in child pornography, trafficking and prostitution. In the case of law enforcement, information and knowledge are key to early crime detection and effective prosecution.

ICTs are also very important in the research, collection of data, and dissemination of information regarding monitoring and law enforcement activities promoted both at national and trans-national lev-
els. For example, ICTs have been used to try to understand and map the phenomenon of children and women trafficking in the Mekong sub-region, in East Asia, which involves thousands of people every year. According to a study published by the UNIFEM East and South East Asia, ICTs may play an essential role in combating trafficking, by collecting data on trafficking as a basis for sound policy and program formulation, preparing a directory on national and sub-regional organizations working in trafficking, and disseminating data and information, including in national languages, to concerned government, non-governmental agencies and other institutions in the region. The Internet has also proved to be a valuable and efficient tool for police and customs investigations where it is used as an instrument for committing crimes.

At the same time, there is broad consensus about the potential threats represented by the use of information and communication technologies – including the telephone, the fax, or the Internet – to expand the scope of international transactions in crimes involving child trafficking and pornography.

More than in any other transnational crime, the speed, mobility and flexibility of computer crime challenge the governments and international law enforcement.

International law enforcement operations – such as Operations Starburst and Cathedral against pedophile rings – have proven the value of coordinated international action by law enforcement and judiciary institutions, both in exchanging information at the preliminary stage and in preventing the tipping off of other ring members when arrests and seizures are made. Such operations have also revealed the major legal and operational difficulties still existing. In the field of co-operation, international networks for the exchange of information are becoming increasingly important for police and customs authorities.

Appropriate legislation at both at the national and international level is necessary yet not sufficient to effectively combat computer-related crime and network misuse. A number of supplementary conditions are also required to complement the legislative measures, such as the creation of specialized national computer-crime police units, where they do not already exist, improved cooperation between law enforcement, industry, consumer organizations and data protection authorities; and encouraging appropriate industry and community-led initiatives, including the standardization and affordability of digital security products.

The issue of encryption is extremely important in this context. Encryption is an essential tool to help prevent crime on the Internet, particularly by enabling the protection of data transmission and by enhancing crime prevention measures.

Hotlines have also proved to be an effective tool to fight child pornography and other Internet-related crimes. Hotlines currently exist in a limited number of countries. Examples include CyberLine in the US and Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) in the UK, which, since 1996, has operated a telephone and e-mail hotline for members of the public to report material encountered on the Internet, which they consider illegal. The IWF judges whether the material is illegal, informs the ISPs and the police. Other monitoring bodies exist also in Norway (Redd Barna), in the Netherlands (Meldpunt), Germany (Newswatch, FSM and Jugendshutz), Austria (ISPAA) and Ireland (ISPAI). In terms of transnational cooperation, the “Excalibur” project, developed by the Swedish National Crime Intelligence Division and co-sponsored by the European Commission under the STOP Program, has proved to be a very successful initiative. This project has been set up with the cooperation of police forces from Germany, UK, the Netherlands and Belgium, together with Europol and Interpol aimed at fighting Internet pedophile networks.

ICT for Advocacy and Awareness Raising

The use of the Internet has also proven to be effective in promoting advocacy and awareness raising civil rights campaigns.

The ‘Say Yes for Children’ international campaign, started in April 2001 is a true success story for the promotion of the rights of the children. The campaign is being promoted by the Global Movement for Children. The initiative is calling on leaders from governments, civil society and the private sector to improve the lives of children. World leaders are asked to take operational steps in some priority areas such as inclusion and protection against all forms of abuse. The campaign, which was strongly supported by the media, is supported by several organizations and international leaders. The power of the Internet has proved to be formidable in this effort. In a few months, the campaign has collected pledges from over 35 million people around the world. The campaign is also helping raise funds aimed at
promoting children's causes, including focused efforts promoted by Netaid such as Netaid Global Schoolhouse, providing education to all children, and the fight against the spreading of HIV/AIDS among children.

Interesting results have been observed in the use of mass media campaigns and initiatives to prevent child abuse. Traditional media which are more accessible to the masses in developing countries – such as radio and television – are becoming an increasingly popular way of educating and protecting children. In some African countries, the popular radio and TV series 'Soul City' played and still plays a crucial role in presenting in an entertaining way, social responses to relevant problems, including violence, sex abuse, HIV/AIDS or racial discrimination. Similar initiatives have been conducted in India.

The 'Sara' Adolescent Girl Communication Initiative, promoted in ten countries of eastern and southern Africa with support from Unicef, uses radio, animated films, books, comics and audio-cassettes to educate adolescent girls and their parents about the importance of staying in school. The series skillfully weaves information on issues such as sexual harassment, early marriage, genital cutting, and girls' domestic workload into entertaining plots about Sara and her friends.

PLAN International - a global children-focused development organization currently reaching out to over one million children and families in some of the world's poorest communities of 43 developing countries – is promoting an interesting media initiative in Haiti.

The pilot Children's Radio Program targets Haitian children and is run by twenty children between ten and sixteen years old. The children, selected through schools, were taught about children's rights and radio programming. They produce weekly radio magazines and special editions, broadcast free of cost from a local community radio station. The radio program reaches the entire North East of Haiti, with total population of about 180,000 people. Also in this case, radio programming aims to empower communities of children. In Haiti, eighty percent of the population lives in absolute poverty, and seventy-five percent of school-age children cannot attend school.

According to Erich Vogt, senior media specialist at the World Bank, "To get a better handle on the endemic problem of child abuse in all of its obvious and hidden forms – emotional abuse, lack of education, lack of opportunity, and in the end leading them down the path of poverty – the larger public needs to become much better informed and sensitized about the scope of the problem. Here the mass media, radio and television, must do what it can do best: comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable. The media must throw its full weight behind the battle against this social cancer. And it can be done better by committing the full force of its programming muscle to educate us about the many causes of child abuse, by showing us the magnitude of the problem and the pain it causes, and by providing a platform to all those who have a stake in bringing up our children in a world without fear, terror, hunger and disease."

The Role of Education

Education is considered vital in protecting children against abuse and in offering a path against poverty. Despite this broad awareness and the efforts to promote education for all around the world, in some regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, more than forty percent of children are not attending school.

The use of ICT for education is one of the top recommendations of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System (Dakar, August 2001), and a call for the "establishment of an Education and ICT fund to promote North-South and South-South cooperation" is included in the final declaration of the Forum. Measures to improve quality and access to education and ICT, and the use of ICT as a media for dissemination of information about such important issues as HIV/AIDS and environmental problems are also considered essential to improve children's protection around the world.

Demand for distance education is expected to grow in both developed and developing countries. According to Pyramid Research, in Latin America, demand for distance education is expected to grow eighteen percent annually during the next five years. Our hope is that new digital opportunities may be offered to the poorest people in the poorest countries, and that the international community remains focused on the road ahead, which is still steep for too many children in the world.
Tatiana França is eleven years old and lives in the ‘Rocinha’ one of the poorest areas in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She likes studying, listening to music, and - she underlines - ‘does not like to do ironing since it’s very boring’. Tatiana is one of the thousands of children who participate in the Kidlink network, an initiative connecting children all over the world. This network helps children know each other, and -most importantly - raises awareness about themselves and about their right to build their own future.

It was May 1990. During the two weeks just prior to the Electronic Networking Association’s (ENA) Fifth International Conference in San Francisco, USA, Odd de Presno – a Norwegian national – organized a very successful online conference for 260 children in Norway, Canada, and the United States. The interest in this initiative proved to be very high and Odd de Presno launched the Kidlink idea to some colleagues in the conference. “We can do conferencing for kids again, as an ongoing activity, or we can drop it. However, if we drop it, we must understand that we are leaving something important behind” De Presno said. On May 25, 1990, Odd de Presno, and the two other founders of Kidlink - Nancy Stefanik and Knut Braatane - gave birth to Kidlink.

After eleven years, over 175,000 children from 144 countries have participated in Kidlink. The initiative today has activities in nineteen languages, including Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, Danish, English, French, German, Hebrew, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Macedonian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Saami, Slovenian, Spanish, and Swedish.

Today, Kidlink is a global, non-commercial, virtual, user-owned organization based in Norway. Since its inception, it is aimed at empowering kids and youth with free educational programs, inter-personal networking and collaboration with peers around the world. The initiative trains kids in the art of growing up and living, without imposing on them adult viewpoints or religious and political perspectives. It provides children guidance to get growing awareness about themselves - their place in society, rights, friends, families, and roots.

The primary means of communication used by Kidlink is electronic mail, although other real-time interactions such as “chat lines”, various types of web-based dialogs, ordinary mail, fax, video conferencing, and ham radio technologies are also used.

The organization is essential-ly based on volunteer work. Over 500 volunteers from forty-two countries have joined the initiative so far.

The initiative has been awarded several prizes, including the first prize in the Global Junior Challenge, (Italy, November 2000) within the category “Educational projects for users up to 18 years old”, and the first prize in the Global Bangemann Challenge’s “IT in all kinds of education” in 1999.

Kidlink in Developing Countries

Kidlink has demonstrated a tremendous educational potential across different countries. Despite having been originated in the developed world, today Kidlink is helping pilot the use of information and communication technologies for low-income populations in the developing world, including Brazil. As many developing coun-
tries, Brazil is not only characterized by childhood-related problems (including extreme poverty, inequality, abuse and youth delinquency), but also by 'digital divide' issues, such as limited access to the Internet and online educational opportunities.

Brazil was the first country where Kidlink experimented new ways of introducing a social agenda into the Kidlink experience and methodology, by creating 'points of access' - or KHouses - where poor children could be connected and offered access to the Kidlink educational curriculum and program. The KHouses are similar to existing community 'telecenters,' or Internet cafes. They are housed in university or private computer labs that occupy the space by day and cede the space to Kidlink at night or during the weekend. KHouses provide educational services to economically less favored groups, like students from poor public schools, and individual youth without access to computers and the Internet.

The first KHouses were opened in the computer lab of the Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro (RioData Centro of PUC-RJ) in March 1996. Today, thirty KHouses exist in Brazil, including in Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, Ceará, São Paulo, Distrito Federal and Minas Gerais.

infoDev Support

In Brazil, infoDev is now supporting a specific Kidlink initiative aimed at expanding its educational program geared to low-income youth through an innovative methodology which trains senior citizens to be volunteer instructors of children.

John Garrison, task manager of the project for infoDev, describes the project as "a very interesting idea. The project is based on the notion that elderly volunteers have the time, experience, and nurturing motivation to mentor low-income youth, many of whom lack effective parental role models in their lives. While the project has had initial success, it has taken longer to implement for several reasons. The principal difficulty faced to date has been the challenges in training senior in computer literacy. The average age of volunteers has been 72 (younger seniors are generally still involved in jobs or in the full time care of their grandchildren) and the instructors are finding that many of the seniors experience some form of "technophobia" demonstrating initial resistance to working on a computer. Further, many have diminishing memory capability and thus the instructional process has taken longer than expected. On the other hand, once the seniors do become comfortable with the computer and begin communication with each other and their youth partners, they have demonstrated great enthusiasm for the program."

The main challenge of Kidlink in Brazil, resides today in its innovative approach, and in the effort to involve a growing number of marginalized communities. John Garrison remarks that "Brazil has quite a lot of interesting programs geared to computer training and/or connectivity. One of the most innovative features of Kidlink is that it combines both training and connectivity. It is also ground-breaking because it brings together the resources of the university, which are generally not utilized for social purposes. The computer labs are used by school students but also by local communities, and that is not only quite important, but provides potential for growth. [...] In several KHouses some of the children involved are children at risk, such as in Fortaleza, where many are street children. In most cases they come from low-income families, but within more stable family situations".

The Kidlink Curriculum

Taking a look of the curriculum offered by Kidlink, it is evident that a strong 'child empowering' effort is under way. The 'Who-am-I?' project is a eight-month curriculum aimed at creating growing awareness of a child's self, his/her environment and society, and the rights all children should be guaranteed - from the most ba-
sic ones to the capacity to follow ones own inclinations and dreams.

Tânia de Vasconcellos is one of the volunteers providing psycho-pedagogical support in one of the KHOuses currently operating in Rio de Janeiro. She remarks that “information technology is a social demand and its potential goes beyond the educational purposes. [...] Our children are already challenged by several ‘divides’ in relation to the rest of the world, and the sooner we provide them with access to the Internet, the lower the handicap they will have.

By helping to build self-esteem, knowledge, and express artistic talents, Kidlink is has become an interesting case study on educational technology methodologies. On the one hand it is a highly flexible model, which is being adapted according to the local needs and educational contexts. On the other hand, it is based on a strong methodology and on the rigorous research work promoted by the Kidlink Institute. The research work is supported by a Research Committee of internationally acclaimed researchers, assisted by research associates in many countries.

John Garrison remarks that, in terms of curriculum and methodology, in Brazil, Kidlink has managed to build a curriculum that fits the country’s educational and social needs. “The online lesson plans include such topics as the meaning of democracy, the life in colonial Brazil, and the role of samba music plays in Brazilian culture. The kids share their online reports and art projects with other classes in other Brazilian states through the Internet, and, of course, all the projects are posted in their own site for everyone to see. In terms of methodology, as a first step, they teach the children how to use computers and be familiar with the Internet. This new skill is quite important as the computer is associated with “modernity” within the Brazilian context. That’s important since most of these children are exposed to the benefits of technology and modern life in the media, but often cannot have access to them. In the area of communication technologies, at least, Kidlink is making a big difference by “leveling the playing field” for these low-income children. “It also allows these children to stimulate their creativity and improve their educational performance in school.”

Replicating the model

Kidlink is still a small organization, based on volunteer work and on the support of local donations. As John points out, “at this stage, Kidlink Brasil is still somewhat surprised at how much they have grown in only five years and are quite pleased to have received the InfoDev grant (their first large external grant). On the other hand, they have no concrete plans to expand dramatically, although they would like their educational approach to be replicated by public and private schools. They realize that they may not be able to compete with larger organizations, which often have more visibility and are better connected, I guess they would like to keep their growth momentum going and will thus look for external funds when the InfoDev grant terminates. For the time being therefore, they don’t think there’s ground for major scaling up, but they hope that their experience will be replicated.”

Whatever the future of Kidlink may be, the initiative is proving to be a unique, viable example of ‘digital opportunity’ at the service of children in the developing world. Our hope is that initiatives such as Kidlink will afford children better opportunities for their future, and may successfully demonstrate new paths to fight violence, abuse, and – ultimately – lack of opportunities.

Further information about Kidlink can be found at www.kidlink.org.
Marisa Lucena on Kidlink

Can you tell our readers how the Brazilian Kidlink initiative started?
The starting of Kidlink in Brazil was the result of my doctoral dissertation, presented in 1997.
In Brazil there was the need to create virtual spaces for the launch of the Internet for education purposes, and I strongly focused on this implementation. During my field research activity, I found out that Kidlink was offering the opportunity to translate and use its services, projects and activities in other countries. I therefore started an in-depth study of the organization, but found that the model could not simply be imported in Brazil. I believed that the Kidlink model needed to be adapted to the Brazilian socio-economic reality. As a matter of fact, Kidlink in Brazil offers some own initiatives, including the KHouses, which today are being taken as models in other countries within the Kidlink network. My idea was to set up a Virtual Open School in the Internet, supported by the pedagogical approach of Kidlink.

What is Kidlink today in Brazil?
I consider Kidlink in Brazil as ‘the Internet kindergarten’ since it was a pioneering tool in introducing teachers and students to the Internet. Today, Kidlink is being adopted by several schools, and is being viewed as a valuable educational technology option among many which exists. I have always preferred an open-ended approach to the Internet, rather than presenting ‘either - or’ options. In Brazil there is room for many initiatives, and we are proud to think that Kidlink was the first to start the process.

How would you describe the initiative in terms of educational and poverty alleviation impact?
There is no doubt the Internet is an elite tool. Today, in Brazil, only people with better economic conditions can own a computer and have Internet access. The public education system only started to address this ‘digital divide’ issue a couple of years ago by starting to distribute computers to some schools. Nonetheless, computer educational programs have not yet been well defined, and Kidlink represented an excellent option for teachers who did not feel ready to introduce and use educational technology in their classes. In this same light, the KHouses played a pioneering role, by opening the doors of various institutions to poorer children, including ‘meninos de rua’ - or street children - and children from low-income communities. KHouse was and still is a successful initiative operating in a complementary fashion with the Brazilian educational system.

Could you tell us something about the new initiative Kidlink is promoting in Brazil, with support from infoDev?
The support coming from infoDev is proving to be crucially important. For example, we were able to organize a national meeting involving all KHouse coordinators from eight Brazilian states. This was the first personal contact between people who had communicated online for the past five years. This event generated a good deal of social energy and will certainly allow us to work in a more integrated and collaborative fashion.

If you could make a wish, how would you like to see Kidlink in Brazil in five years?
Volunteerism is not as customary in Brazil as in some other countries. It is very interesting to note how Kidlink in Brazil has been able to motivate so many volunteers in its schools. My greatest wish is that our work continue to be recognized, followed and replicated. Our greatest objective is to open KHouses in other Brazilian states and cities as a way to bring low-income children and adults into the Information Society and reduce the socio-educational inequalities in Brazil.
...a global grant program managed by the World Bank on behalf of public and private Donors who support it.

infoDev pools intellectual, technical and financial resources from public and private partners. It aims at reducing poverty through the use of ICT in areas such as market development, education, health, government, commerce and environmental protection. infoDev promotes efficient markets in communications and information infrastructure. It innovates through small-scale projects with a potential for replicability; disseminates best practices, lessons learned from its own activities and from other experiences relevant to the development community; and supports special initiatives such as the promoting a regional connectivity, or helping address the millennium computing bug, or Y2K problem.

infoDev provides a framework for initiating a range of new development ideas to be field-tested. Project proposals can be submitted by government agencies, private companies, academic institutions or non-governmental organizations. Since its creation at the end of 1995, infoDev has received 782 proposals for projects in all parts of the developing world, 148 of which have been funded so far (excluding grants under the Y2K Initiative).

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