

OPENING REMARKS BY THE UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR
AND UNDP RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE
MS. ELIZABETH LWANGA

DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF
THE WEB FOR DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

28 NOVEMBER 2007 AT THE UN COMPLEX GIGIRI NAIROBI

The Permanent Secretary Ministry of Information and Communication,
Dr. Bitange Ndemo,

Mr. Nicholas You, Office of the Executive Director, UN-HABITAT,

Mr. Soon-Hong Choi, Assistant Secretary General, Information Technology
Office, United Nations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations System in Kenya, I take this opportunity to welcome you to this conference. I am informed that we have close to 400 participants representing 48 countries and over 50 colleagues from the UN.

This conference marks yet another milestone in global development as the original aim of WEB4DEV was to enhance the use of internet for development.

It is most appropriate that this conference is being held in Africa this time, at a time when Africa is lagging behind in use of ICT and as a result has not been able to fully benefit from globalization. Africa, therefore, needs the necessary technical and infrastructure development support to participate and take advantage of the ongoing information technology revolution.

Internet has made the World a Global Village. As a result information flow and use of Internet has become a key factor of production just as much as land, labour and capital, those that are able to tap into this factor can increase efficiency and effectiveness producing more economic benefits. In the area of social and economic development, the role of information technology cannot be over emphasized. It is crucial to social and economic integration and

networking, where decision makers need to access accurate and timely information to enable them make informed and appropriate decisions. Hence Internet is needed not only to facilitate decision making at the national level but also to boost Global cooperation and integration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You may recall that in September 2000, the member states of the United Nations adopted a Millennium Declaration and identified key goals for development in the Millennium Development Goals, or better known as MDGs. This commitment sets specific MDG targets for reducing poverty and calls for concerted action to fight injustice, inequality and to protect the environment. Among the commitments they made was one to “ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies are available to all.” This conference is therefore important in many ways:

First, we are confident that the conference will deliberate on the issue of how best ICT and the Internet can further the achievement of Millennium Development Goals, balance political, economic, and social interests, and help to bridge the gap between rich and poor.

Secondly, the conference brings together the United Nations, international development agencies, private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations to share knowledge, skills and ideas on using the web to stimulate and accelerate development. The ideas so generated will go along way in the effort to reduce extreme poverty by 2015 and to impact on the spread of HIV/AIDS, as well as achievement of the other goals. Of important consideration also is the need to monitor the progress made towards achievement of MDGs. The UN Development Programme in partnership with the Statistics Division of the UN

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Relief Web of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have launched an MDG Monitor available on the Internet. Funding and in-kind support for this were provided by Google and Cisco Systems. Development and promotion of such tools is an important milestone towards achievement of MDGs.

Thirdly, I note with appreciation that this conference has a special focus on the youth. Today the youth represents 70 percent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately the majority of the youth lack the necessary skills to participate in economic development. This conference should explore how other regions such as Asia have used the Internet to accelerate expansion of employment opportunities and increase export earnings as a result of the production of ICT-related goods and services and replicate the same for Africa.

Lastly and most importantly, this conference should offer an opportunity to further examine ways and means how the Internet could boost productivity; enhance Africa's competitiveness and growth within the economic sectors.

I would like to share with you some of the UNDP's experiences in the use of the ICT to promote development:

In China, the UNDP has been actively involved in assisting the government with provision of policy guidance to mainstream ICT into national development priorities such as distance education, health care, and creation of economic opportunities through access to ICTs in poor and remote areas. Another initiative in China is the establishment of rural telecenter networks in nationally designated poor counties in central and western provinces. The project has been

well received and is achieving significant impact and results that are appreciated by beneficiaries and the local governments.

Another example, also in China, is the partnership with the State Customs Administration in which, UNDP introduced an innovative Governance Management of Customs Automation and Information Management System, which led to the efficiency of customs clearance and standardized customs management at all levels. The use of the Customs Automation and Information Management System has speeded up customs clearance of transactions in some places from 22 days to 2 minutes.

In Kenya, in 2004 UNDP supported the establishment of two telecenters in Kisii and Tabaka townships for use by soapstone carvers. This effort has resulted in 30 percent increase in the total direct export sales of soapstone carvings by soapstone producers that previously were only sold through middlemen in Nairobi.

UNDP is also working with the Government of Kenya through the E-Governance Secretariat to improve a number of government services and expand the access of these services through IT. Some of the main achievements of this project include E-Transactions policy presented to parliament, and 350 Government officials trained on ICT in the districts.

As I conclude these remarks, I wish to by suggest that this Conference looks further into - what needs to be done to guarantee that access to information becomes as wide and inclusive as possible, bearing in mind that the cost of accessing the Internet is currently beyond affordable levels of the majority of the people in Sub-Saharan Africa; and furthermore look at how regional

cooperation among telecommunication service providers can be strengthened in order to improve and develop quality communications services and minimize cost.

Once again on behalf of the United Nations system in Kenya, welcome and wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.