ICT and MDGs

Promoting the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) can increase the likelihood and reduce the costs of meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This ESW illustrated the opportunities ICT can offer in each of the MDG sectors and showcased World Bank Group projects in these sectors where ICT has been used effectively. The ESW contributed to ramping up the Bank’s analytical work on ICT and development, to development and adoption of core ICT indicators, and to enhanced ICT monitoring and evaluation capacity in developing countries.

1. Challenge

The MDGs adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 set ambitious targets in eight areas: poverty and hunger; primary education; gender equality; child mortality; maternal health; HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; environmental sustainability; and global partnerships. Substantial human and financial resources need to be deployed effectively and efficiently if countries are to meet these goals. A key question is how investments in ICT can help accelerate progress toward achieving the MDGs.

The first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held in Geneva in December 2003, discussed the underlying principles of a successful “information society.” It emphasized the need to ensure affordable access to information and communication infrastructure, develop national e-strategies, and harness the potential of ICT to promote the MDGs. The ESW activity was launched in August 2003 to prepare background publications and shape the World Bank Group’s agenda for the WSIS. The team worked closely with the IFC and the World Economic Forum (WEF) and maintained contact with all the multilateral development banks.

2. Findings and Dissemination

The ESW first outlined the three channels of social, economic, and political empowerment through which ICT can have an impact on development. It looked at how these technologies are being used to promote development in the areas of poverty reduction, education, gender issues, health, environmental sustainability, and global partnerships. In order to reach these MDG targets, developing countries can either allocate more resources to these objectives or increase the efficiency with which existing resources are used.

This ESW highlighted the positive role ICT can play as an enabling tool for development, making contributions to greater efficiency in delivering the MDGs and thus accelerating achievement of the targets. For example, ICT can provide new, more efficient methods of production, bring previously unattainable markets within reach of local producers, improve the delivery of government services, and increase access to basic social goods and services. Finally, the ESW highlighted selected projects funded by the World Bank Group (WBG) in which an ICT component has contributed to the intended development outcomes.

Given the emphasis of the MDGs on measuring outcomes, the ESW reports underscored the need
to establish empirical links between ICT and achievement of the MDGs (or development in general). Three types of analysis are required. One is an analytical framework to quantify the relationship between ICT and the MDG sectors with respect to the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of ICT inputs. The second is an impact evaluation of donor activities with an emphasis on attribution. The third is replicability analysis to identify good practices for scaling up, based on measured outcomes. More vigorous monitoring and evaluation is essential to all three efforts.

The ESW outputs consisted of two publications. A World Bank report, *ICT and MDGs*, was disseminated at the WSIS in Geneva, where it reached approximately 16,000 participants from governments, the private sector, and civil society in 176 countries. An article titled "Poverty ‘e Readication’: Using ICT to Meet MDG" was published as a chapter in the World Economic Forum’s *Global Information Technology Report 2003-2004*.

### 3. Subsequent Role of the Bank

This ESW was instrumental in the World Bank Group becoming a founding member of the Global Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development in June 2004, along with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the UN Regional Commissions. In line with the recommendations of the ESW, this partnership aims to develop a coherent and structured approach to advancing the use of ICT indicators for better monitoring and measurement of development outcomes.

A WBG delegation participated in the second phase of the WSIS in Tunis in November 2005. It organized a forum and workshops on various topics related to use of ICT for development and poverty reduction.

### 4. Key Results

The ESW contributed to results in several areas:

*Increased ICT monitoring and evaluation (M&E) at the Bank and by external stakeholders.* The World Bank’s Global Information and Communications Technologies (GICT) department, working in collaboration with the Development Data Group (DECDG), developed a Web-based ICT data resources page. This gives Bank staff and external stakeholders one-stop access to more than 100 up-to-date ICT indicators from at least 10 different data sources, along with ICT tables for about 150 countries, indexes created by other international organizations to measure ICT sector performance, and M&E toolkits, including impact evaluation frameworks. In addition, robust impact evaluations are being launched in GICT to guide policy development and public investment decisions. The impact evaluations assess the socioeconomic impacts and cost effectiveness of public investment in ICT interventions. They are being applied to the Bank’s rural ICT projects in Cambodia, China, and Nicaragua. All these help inform and influence policy makers regarding their decisions on ICT interventions.

*Harmonization of ICT statistics.* The Global Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development is working to set standards and harmonize ICT statistics at the global level. Toward this end, it has developed a core list of ICT indicators and is encouraging all countries to collect them in order to provide internationally comparable statistics on the information society. The list of indicators (10 country-level, 20 household, and 20 business indicators) was developed through intensive consultations between the Partnership and national statistics offices and through a series of regional events. The indicators were then presented and adopted at the WSIS Thematic Meeting on Measuring the Information Society in February 2005. The Partnership organized workshops to build capacity for ICT data collection and dissemination in various developing countries.
These included regional workshops in Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, and Asia-Pacific, and for the Arab countries. The Partnership is also developing a global ICT database on the core indicators to be hosted by UNdata, the United Nations data portal. The Partnership’s Task Group on Database Development is jointly chaired by the World Bank’s DECDG and GICT.

5. Lessons Learned

There are two main lessons to be drawn from this ESW activity. First is the importance of working in partnerships and involving thought leaders. The team drew on expertise and innovative thinking from the WEF, the ITU (the main organizer of the WSIS event), the OECD, and UNCTAD. These partners provided useful feedback on the reports and collaborated on follow-up activities, notably the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development and WSIS II.

The second lesson concerns the wide dissemination of findings. Since this ESW activity resulted in publications, its alignment with the World Bank’s participation at the WSIS summit was key. The chapter published in the WEF’s Global Information Technology Report also achieved high visibility. Through both routes, the ESW analysis and findings reached a wide readership, demonstrating the WBG’s intellectual leadership in this area and showcasing its financial assistance through loans, private sector investments, guarantees, and grants. This in turn has significantly enhanced WBG influence on the development agenda in the ICT sector.

6. Learn More


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