THE STATUS OF THE GLOBAL DIGITAL SOLIDARITY FUND (DSF)

Motivation

The foundation of the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) was motivated by the South's urgent desire to bridge the North-South digital divide and ensure that the digital opportunities emerging from the evolving information society are harnessed to the benefit of the poor people. Its moral principles are embedded in the 2003 Geneva Declaration and Plan of Action as well as in the 2005 Tunis Agenda of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Origins

The origin of the "digital solidarity" concept can be traced back to the 1996 Geneva conference on *New Technologies for Development in Africa*. The conference was co-chaired by the then president of Mali - Mr. Alpha O. Konaré and the president of the Geneva State Council - Mr. Guy-Olivier Segond.

Four years later, during the "Bamako 2000" conference on the *Internet and its implications for development*, the concept received further endorsements from the civil society organisations. And in 2002, the "digital solidarity" concept was officially adopted by the assembly of African states in Bamako during the African Regional preparatory conference for the first WSIS. However, it was the former president of Senegal, Mr Abdoulaye Wade, supported by most African leaders who developed the "digital solidarity" concept into a digital development fund called the Global Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) when he made the proposal to the 2003 WSIS in Geneva.

The idea was rejected at the 2003 WSIS summit but the proponents continued lobbying and mobilizing funds until the DSF was unanimously endorsed by all member states of the United Nations in February 2005 in Geneva during the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the second WSIS. The fund was officially inaugurated on 14th March 2005 in Geneva in the form of a Swiss law foundation under the surveillance of the Swiss confederation. Its existence was acknowledged in paragraph 28 of the Tunis Agenda:

We welcome the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) established in Geneva as an innovative financial mechanism of a voluntary nature open to interested stakeholders with the objective of transforming the digital divide into digital opportunities for the developing world by focusing mainly on specific and urgent needs at the local level and seeking new voluntary sources of "solidarity" finance. The DSF will complement existing mechanisms for funding the Information Society, which should continue to be fully utilized to fund the growth of new ICT infrastructure and services.

Financing

The fund proposed an innovative financing mechanism known as the "1% digital solidarity contribution" or otherwise referred to as "the Geneva principle". The "Geneva Principle" was a voluntary commitment of authorities (i.e local, national and the private sector) who decide to introduce and/or effect the 1% digital solidarity clause on the all their bids relating to ICT equipment and services. The vendor who wins the bid contributes a 1% of the transaction to the DSF. The contribution was thought not to be a tax nor a gift but was an investment in the markets of the future and gave the right to the label "Digital Solidarity".

Operations

The DSF prioritized the health and education sectors allocating 60% of the funds to the LDCs, 30% to DCs & 10% to countries in transition and developed countries. Projects included the Tele-medicine & Tele-Education programs in Africa, Latin America & Asia, E-Waste management in Africa, E-Collect

program (Re-use of second-hand computers for educations and training programs), and the 1,000 Tele-Medicine Units in Africa program.

Demise?

The collapse of the DSF has largely been attributed to the lack of funding. The promoters of the fund failed to rally the support of most of the countries of the North who are the largest consumers of ICT equipment and services. The unsystematic and non-binding nature of the financing mechanism was also partly to blame for its failure. It was estimated that in close to four years of its existence, the DSF had only raised US$6.4 million.

According to an online petition to save the DSF, operations at DSF secretariat were officially closed on 26th January 2009.

****

"CONNECT 2020 AGENDA": ANOTHER EFFORT TO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE!

The "Connect 2020 Agenda" is a multi-stakeholder effort led by the ITU to try and bridge the digital divide as set out in the 2003 WSIS Geneva Declaration and Plan of Action and the 2005 Tunis Agenda. It was born at the 2014 Plenipotentiary Conference of the ITU in Korea as a plan of action for the Post-2015 ICT sector's role in achieving sustainable development in view of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ongoing efforts towards achieving the MDGs. The Agenda was set around four goals and 17 targets to be achieved by the year 2020[1].

GOAL I: GROWTH - *Enable and foster access to and increased use of telecommunication/ICT*
> **TARGETS:**
> - Target 1.1: Worldwide, 55% of households should have access to the Internet by 2020
> - Target 1.2: Worldwide, 60% of individuals should be using the Internet by 2020
> - Target 1.3: Worldwide, telecommunication/ICT should be 40% more affordable by 2020

GOAL II: INCLUSIVENESS - *Bridge the digital divide and provide broadband for all*
> **TARGETS:**
> - Target 2.1.A: In the developing world, 50% of households should have access to the Internet by 2020
> - Target 2.1.B: In the least developed countries (LDCs), 15% of households should have access to the Internet by 2020
> - Target 2.2.A: In the developing world, 50% of individuals should be using the Internet by 2020
> - Target 2.2.B: In the least developed countries (LDCs), 20% of individuals should be using the Internet by 2020
> - Target 2.3.A: The affordability gap between developed and developing countries should be reduced by 40% by 2020
> - Target 2.3.B: Broadband services should cost no more than 5% of average monthly income in developing countries by 2020
> - Target 2.4: Worldwide, 90% of the rural population should be covered by broadband services by 2020
> - Target 2.5.A: Gender equality among Internet users should be reached by 2020

---

[1] http://www.itu.int/en/connect2020/Pages/default.aspx

➤ Target 2.5.B: Enabling environments ensuring accessible telecommunication/ICT for persons with disabilities should be established in all countries by 2020

GOAL III: SUSTAINABILITY - *Manage challenges resulting from telecommunication/ICT development*

TARGETS:
➤ Target 3.1: Cybersecurity readiness should be improved by 40% by 2020
➤ Target 3.2: Volume of redundant e-waste to be reduced by 50% by 2020
➤ Target 3.3: Green House Gas emissions generated by the telecommunication/ICT sector to be decreased per device by 30% by 2020

GOAL III: INNOVATION & PARTNERSHIP - *Lead, improve and adapt to the changing telecommunication/ICT environment*

TARGETS:
➤ Target 4.1: Telecommunication/ICT environment conducive to innovation
➤ Target 4.2: Effective partnerships of stakeholders in telecommunication/ICT environment

The 2017 Connet2020 Agenda progress report has cast doubt at the possibility of attaining these targets by 2020. Key among the challenges is the possibility of finding scalable and replicable technologies that can be used to connect "the large rural offline population at minimal costs, and finding effective strategies for narrowing the usage gaps (including the gender gap) across all regions"[2]. The existing initiatives to address these challenges and provide cheap internet to low-income communities (e.g. Alphabet's Loon Balloons in Sri Lanka & Indonesia, Facebook's Connectivity Lab) will likely not be deployed in the next three years. Therefore, the majority of the people to come online by 2020 will be from urban areas and areas that already have the necessary infrastructure.

---

[2] http://broadbandcommission.org/Documents/ITU_discussion-paper_Davos2017.pdf