

Chapter 48

The Policy of Uses of ICTs in Developing Countries: The Case of Tunisia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the policy of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the development of countries, especially on Tunisia. The first part of the article summarizes the evolution of the definition of ICTs policy. In the second part, the authors assess the contribution of ICT to the development of Tunisia. Tunisian's response to these ICT challenges is discussed from three viewpoints. Firstly, the ways ICTs are impacting on the business, management and development. Secondly, what is being done with regard to ICT policies, especially for all sectors of the society. Thirdly, the impact the broader vision of policy has. In the final part, the relationship between policies of ICTs and sustainable development is discussed. On the basis of the technology-knowledge-innovation-economic development cycle, individual participation is thought to begin with general, ICT and business. The fascinating case history of the Finnish Information Society which lends significant tangible support to this and other models is summarized.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, the convergence (both in terms of technology and markets) of telecommunications, the mass media, networked computing environments, and the internet has changed the way the developed world works and plays. This information and communica-

tions technology (ICT) based “network society” is seen as the generator of a “new economy”, manifested in such icons as Silicon Valley and the Asian Tigers. However, almost all of these dramatic changes have been taking place in the developed world, whilst the developing world, and especially Africa, appears to be falling ever further behind. This “digital divide” will continue to widen as long as Africa is excluded from the network society and the new economy. While the

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potential advantages of ICT for Development are enormous national policies are yet to adequately reflect truly comprehensive and integrated strategies for harnessing and exploiting his potential. Much mention has been made of a growing digital divide between countries (Boudchon, 2002). However, just as technology and knowledge gaps need to be bridged between countries, the increasing information and technology gap within countries also requires critical attention. There is, perhaps, a directly attributable link between growing inequality within nations and the intra-national digital and information divide.

The debate on ICT has permanently shifted from “why” ICT for development, to “how” comprehensive and holistic ICT policies can unleash human potential and enhance people’s capabilities to improve their lives. Sound ICT policies that are truly pro-poor must be an indispensable part of national development strategies. But:

- *How to introduce ICTs in national development planning at every-level (national, district or regional, local and community)?*
- *How Tunisia and Africa can organize, plan and marshal resources to best meet the needs of their constituencies using ICTs?*
- *How measure the benefits and outcomes of using ICTs in human development term?*

This chapter proposes that the universal provision of a broader vision of policy of ICTs is an essential first step in reversing this exclusion and stimulating sustainable development. Its objectives are to explain the nature of people focused ICT policy formulation and strategy development. Using practices drawn from Tunisia and around Africa, it discusses the role of ICT policy-making in human development. In particular, its potential contribution in the fight against poverty, advocacy for management and sustainable development, advancement of good governance and the achievement of MDGs is highlighted.

The chapter focuses on the strategy required in developing ICT policies. Also discussed are questions that need to be considered in developing an ICT strategy, the sectors that ICT policy-making needs to deal with, and the approach to ICT action planning. Related topics covered include strategies for various sectors: ICTs applied to learning and management, ICTs for local and community development as well as the development objectives and outcomes sought through an ICT strategy. Some of the principles of implementation that need to be considered from a human development perspective are outlined and discussed.

BACKGROUND

Information technology (IT) is “a fancy name for data processing”, according to Newton (2002). It means all equipment, processes, procedures and systems used to provide and support information systems (both computerized and manual) within an organization and those reaching out to customers and suppliers (Newton, 2002). The term information and communications technology (ICT) was coined to reflect the seamless convergence of digital processing and telecommunications.

ICTs include hardware, processes, and systems that are used for storing, managing, communicating and sharing information. These tools can be either manual or computerized (digital) (Duncombe & Heeks, 1999). This definition of ICTs extends to older non digital devices such as analogue radio and television. Beyond hardware, i.e., computers, wireless devices, telecommunications towers, etc. ICTs include computer software and associated systems such as management methods and practices, or the so-called application layer.

An ICT with a far-reaching impact is the internet, a worldwide network of computers connected through a robust digital technology called the IP protocol (Internet protocol), which permits the efficient routing, transmission and management of bits and bytes of data between computers. Mobile

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