

Chapter 1.1

ICT Strategy for Development: Lessons Learnt from the Egyptian Experience in Developing Public– Private Partnerships

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ABSTRACT

Emerging information and communication technology (ICT) is setting the pace for a changing, competitive and dynamic global marketplace and representing an enabling platform for business and socioeconomic development in the 21st century. In that respect, developing nations are urged to keep pace regularly with the developments taking place in the developed world through the design and implementation of strategy, vision and detailed plans for universal access in terms of ICT literacy and its effective utilization for developmental purposes were ICT is promoted as a vehicle for development. It is important to note that building the ICT infrastructure and infostructure will not realize quantum leaps in the development process unless it is coupled with concrete projects and initiatives that engage the society at large with its multiple stakeholders from public, private, government and civil society organizations irrespective of their locations whether urban or remote, gender or background. This chapter describes the evolution of the ICT sector in Egypt over the last decade with an emphasis on national ICT strategy development and deployment as an integral element of Egypt's overall development process within the context of an emerging economy and the various growing potentials ICT offers for its socioeconomic development.

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OVERVIEW

Developing nations when addressing their future development plans, they need to develop a formula that integrates the changes and developments that are taking place globally and adapt a methodology that addresses their local changing needs while optimally allocating their limited resources to serve their business and socioeconomic development requirements. Moreover, in the case of policy-makers, promoting ICT for development has taken center stage due to its impact on development and on democracy across different sectors with implications on governance, better management and transparency (Fraseri, 2002). Within the context of information and communication technology (ICT) deployment in developing nations, it is worth noting that in the 1960s and 1970s the focus was more directed to the role played by the state. During the 1980s and 1990s, the attention was shifted to the role played by the private sector and ICT multinationals. In the early years of the 21st century, the attention was shifted to the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their vital involvement in diffusing ICT among different communities at urban and rural levels and especially underprivileged groups. The role of the civil society was also coupled with the growing attention being directed to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the role of the community at large to integrate socially with the underprivileged segments in the community. Developing nations should focus on various socioeconomic needs of the society and to the benefits that could be realized from the amalgamation of the experiences and resources of the state (government), private sector, public sector and the civil society through models of partnership and collaboration such as public-private partnership (PPP). For example, in the case of Malta through their “*thesmartisland*” national ICT strategy intends by deploying a multi stakeholders approach to improve social inequality, disadvantages and disabilities while improving the quality of life of the citizens. The objective is

to contribute to the long-term national development plans by capitalizing on the opportunities enabled through ICT, which led to allocate investment and ICT under the same cabinet office. A different approach deployed by Liberia looks at competition, investment, innovation and ICT as part of an overall integrated solution that needs to be formulated for ICT to have an effective impact on business and socioeconomic development and growth (Kamel, 2009).

ICT innovations are increasingly having important implications on business and socioeconomic development due to its role in introducing and diffusing the concepts of knowledge sharing, community development and equality. However, it is important to note that having the ICT infrastructure alone is not enough to solve all developmental problems; ICT should be looked at as a catalyst, a platform for development that needs the environmental and logistical setting to help the developmental process (Harris 1998; Kransberg 1991). The implications of ICT for development could be felt at the individual, organizational and societal levels. ICT advances have always changed the way human interact. While the basic needs of humankind have long been food, clothing and shelter, the time has come to add information to such invaluable list. The implications on developing nations could be remarkably effective if these technology innovations are properly introduced and managed in a world increasingly affected by access to timely, effective and accurate information. However, if the implementation process is not well supported and controlled, the result could be an increasing digital divide between developed and developing nations. It is important to avoid the fact that ICT could be marginalized in the development process. There is an urgent need to show that ICT generates the wealth of the enterprise, which in turn pays for socioeconomic development at large. Moreover, it is ICT that is delivering the productivity gains that enable lives of material comfort for many around the world that would have been unthinkable only two centuries ago (Heeks, 2005).

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