

# **ISSUE OBJECTIVES FOR THE 2002 G8 KANANASKIS SUMMIT - DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE (DOT FORCE) -**

## **Introduction**

The digital divide that currently exists between industrialized and developing countries constitutes a critical component of any comprehensive strategy to reduce poverty throughout the international community. One element of the G8 member countries' strategy to reduce global poverty is the Digital Opportunities Taskforce (DOT Force), a G8-led consortium of governmental, private sector and not-for-profit agencies located in developed and developing countries. The DOT Force was instated at the Kyushu-Okinawa Summit in 2000 under the aegis of the Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society. From its inception, the central mandate of the DOT Force has been to make progress toward harnessing information and communication technologies to effectively reduce poverty in developing nations.

## **1. Genoa 2001 and Beyond**

To date, much progress has been made in that direction. In the follow-up to the Genoa Summit in 2001, the DOT Force members engaged in a series of meetings and consultations with stakeholders and other concerned audiences on a global basis. In particular, the dialogue involved an analysis of the causes of the digital divide, the potential for new information and communication technologies to reduce poverty and empower individuals. During this time, an assortment of strategies, policies and concrete actions were explored as a means to enhance digital opportunities globally in the context of addressing key development initiatives. This global outreach culminated in the release at the Genoa Summit in 2001 of the seminal action-oriented report of the DOT Force grouping, "Digital Opportunities for All: Meeting the Challenge Report of the Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force) including a proposal for a Genoa Plan of Action 11 May 2001".

The Genoa Plan of Action identified nine priority areas that must be addressed in order for the DOT Force to fulfill its mandate. These are as follows: support development of national e-strategies; improve connectivity, increase access, and lower costs; enhance human capacity development, knowledge creation and sharing; foster enterprise, jobs and entrepreneurship; universal participation in global ICT governance; dedicated LDC initiative; ICT for health care and support against disease; support local content and applications development; and prioritize the contribution of ICTs in ODA programs and enhance coordination of initiatives.

At Genoa, three interrelated commitments were made by the G8 member countries to advance the DOT Force agenda. These are as follows:

1. We will continue to support the process and encourage all stakeholders to demonstrate ownership, to mobilize expertise and resources and to build on this successful cooperation.
2. We will review the implementation of the Genoa Plan of Action at our next Summit on the basis of a report by the G8 Presidency.
3. We also encourage development of an Action Plan on how e-government can strengthen democracy and the rule of law by empowering citizens and making the provision of essential government services more efficient.

In October 2001, a meeting was held in Montreal, Canada, where nine implementation teams mirroring each of these areas were established.<sup>1</sup> Each team consisted of governments, public agencies, private sector businesses and non-profit organizations from the DOT Force member states. A division of labour was introduced to maximize efficiency and effectiveness; in order to maximize efficiency and reduce overlap, each of the DOT Force member countries was allocated specific responsibilities under one or more teams.

Each team was responsible for defining a number of core objectives falling under its priority area, devising a business model to execute the defined goals, and then securing implementation. The basic framework of each implementation team was set out at the Montreal meeting in October, and refined during a conference call where the chairs and co-chairs reviewed progress in fulfilling the DOT Force's mandate.<sup>2</sup> A final pre-Summit meeting was held in Calgary on May 5-7, 2002 and chaired by Canada, at which the DOT Force members finalized their reports on the implementation of the Action Plan.<sup>3</sup> The following is a brief description of the issues addressed by each implementation team as the DOT Force strove to fulfill its mandate under the Genoa Plan of Action in the lead-up to the Kananaskis Summit.

### **Team #1 – Support Development of National e-Strategies**

Team #1 was charged with the responsibility of developing an International e-Development Resource Network (IeDRN), which will be a collection of regulatory, policy and strategy expertise from both North and South. This team was also charged with initiating the Global Digital Opportunities Initiative (GDOI) that will provide developing nations with *pro bono* expertise and resources to create e-strategies that advance development goals. Lastly, Team #1 was responsible for organizing an Italian initiative on “E-Government for Development”.

### **Team #2 – Improve Connectivity, Increase Access, and Lower Costs**

Team #2 offers a way for donors to prioritize funding in the area of connectivity and access through collaboration with other agencies. Specifically, its mandate was to help G8 Leaders as they work to respond materially to the priorities of African development that are expressed in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

### **Team #3 – Enhance Human Capacity Development, Knowledge Creation and Sharing**

Team #3 was to determine and specify which additional activities/programs should be developed in order to cover urgent demands of the developing countries and initiate the necessary steps to enhance human capacity development, knowledge creation and sharing.

### **Team #4 – Foster Enterprise, jobs and entrepreneurship**

The functional responsibility of Team #4 involved setting up a New Not-for-Profit Organisation (NNPO) project that aims to define a framework for a new program or organization that would support entrepreneurship in ICT. The proposed NNPO would offer mentoring, incubating and networking assistance to selected entrepreneurs in developing countries. It was also responsible for providing seed capital through an established fund. The Open Economies project is developing policies, regulatory and legal services for government and business leaders working to bridge the global digital divide.

### **Team #5 – Universal Participation in Global ICT Governance**

Team #5 was assigned the task of launching a Network of Thought Leaders and Experts to nurture a new generation of advocates and policy makers. It was also responsible for designing demonstration processes that could be developed for effective intervention, experimentation and demonstration of the benefits of increased capacity among developing-nation stakeholders.

### **Team #6 – Dedicated LDC Initiative for ICT Inclusion**

The mandate of Team #6 was to ensure Lesser Developed Countries (LDCs) are given special attention within the work of the other Teams. One specific objective was to closely link with the New Partnership for Africa's Development initiative (NEPAD).

### **Team #7 – ICT for Health Care and Support Against Disease**

Team #7 was charged with the responsibility of forming a joint working group to address the substantive issues of ICT in Health Care and HIV/AIDS

### **Team #8 – Support Local Content and Applications Development**

The task assigned to Team #8 was the creation of an Open Knowledge Network (OKN). OKN is to make local information widely available through local, regional, and international access points. It is also responsible for promoting the use and dissemination of Open Source Software (OSS) within developing countries by creating a public-private OSS consortium

### **Team #9 – Prioritize the Contribution of ICT's in ODA Programs and Enhance Coordination of Initiatives**

Finally, Team #9's role was to encourage discussions and collaboration among the various bilateral donor agencies.

## **2. Towards Kananaskis 2002**

Following the Genoa Summit, the DOT Force membership has, on the whole, made considerable progress in fulfilling the tasks impugned upon it by the Genoa Plan of Action. The series of meetings held by the membership in 2001 and 2002, where progress has been reviewed in a transparent fashion, demonstrates the G8 leadership's dedication to fulfilling the Genoa commitments to "support the process and encourage all stakeholders to demonstrate ownership, to mobilize expertise and resources and to build on this successful cooperation" and to "encourage development of an Action Plan on how e-government can strengthen democracy and the rule of law by empowering citizens and making the provision of essential services more efficient". As well, given the DOT Force grouping's past efforts at reviewing progress of implementing the Genoa Plan of Action, it is unlikely that the G8 will avoid fulfilling its commitment to "review the implementation of the Genoa Plan of Action" at the Kananaskis Summit.

As far as the DOT-Force related Genoa commitments go, the G8 appears to have kept its word. Co-operation has been laudable, and a clear-operational framework through which the DOT Force initiatives can be carried out has been developed. Nonetheless, much work remains for the G8 as it moves forward in bridging the digital divide. In the first place, the submission of a report to the G8 outlining the successful creation of a business plan to advance the DOT Force agenda may fulfill the Genoa commitment, but will offer little benefit to developing countries if not accompanied by concrete tangible resources. While resources have been allocated by the DOT Force to bridge the digital divide in the form of expertise and diplomacy, little evidence of tangible, including fiscal, resource distribution under the auspices of the DOT Force exists to date. The operational framework for bridging the digital divide is in place; the next step is for the G8 to spearhead concrete initiatives to make effective use of the organizational structures they have developed. In short, a further commitment on the part of the G8 membership to support the DOT Force initiative materially would be a worthy move forward.

One goal of the DOT Force initiative is to ultimately transferring implementation responsibilities to appropriate international and multilateral bodies, like the United Nations, after the G8 Summit at Kananaskis.<sup>4</sup> The G8 should make an assessment of which bodies are best equipped to assume responsibility for bridging the digital divide, and then specify how, when and what responsibilities will be assigned in this regard. In this contest, the G8 may find it useful to build upon the linkages it has already formed with other organizations devoted to bridging the Digital Divide, such as the UN Information & Communications Technologies (ICT) Task Force.<sup>5</sup> In addition, multilateral international bodies are often poorly equipped to raise monies to finance their activities. Given their dependence on resources provided by states, the G8 could play a leadership role in the reassignment of DOT Force responsibilities to international organizations by making appropriate fiscal commitments.

A final problem that the G8 should address at Kananaskis is the apparent deficiency of the Russian leadership in bridging the digital divide. As a G8 member, Russia is necessarily involved as a member of the G8-led DOT Force process. Yet, the only DOT Force implementation team involving Russian participation is in Team #3 (Enhance Human Capacity Development, Knowledge Creation and Sharing). However, even in this case, where Microsoft Russia has participant status, the Russian *government's* active involvement is open to question (as opposed to the operating in a branch plant capacity as a ward of the United States-centred Microsoft company).<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the website for the Russian Digital Opportunities Task Force<sup>7</sup> has not been updated since June 1, 2001. Russia's partnership with Global Knowledge Partnership to organize a consultative process appears to have ended,<sup>8</sup> and their discussion forum has not had any messages posted since March 16, 2001.<sup>9</sup> There are also no records from a planned conference, "Global Knowledge Russia", scheduled to be held on 25-26 September 2001.<sup>10</sup> Overall, these findings may reflect the fact that Russia may be more on the receiving end of the digital divide rather than on the information technology providing side. The G8 membership should strive to ensure Russia plays a more constructive and active role in bridging the digital divide, and at a minimum increase the availability of information concerning progress made in improving digital opportunities within the Russian state itself.

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June 2002

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<sup>1</sup> "The Way Forward: Report on the conclusions of the organizational meeting of the DOT Force Implementation Teams", Montreal, Canada, October 9-10, 2001.

[http://www.dotforce.org/reports/montreal\\_report.doc](http://www.dotforce.org/reports/montreal_report.doc).

<sup>2</sup> "2<sup>nd</sup> Update on the Implementation of the DOT Force Genoa Plan of Action February, 2002", Conference Call, February 25, 2002.

[http://www.dotforce.org/reports/Summary\\_ConfCall\\_Feb\\_2002.doc](http://www.dotforce.org/reports/Summary_ConfCall_Feb_2002.doc).

<sup>3</sup> Industry Canada Information Bulletin, "Canada Chairs Information and Communication Technologies for Development Meeting" May 7, 2002

<http://www.ic.gc.ca/cmb/Welcomeic.nsf/261ce500dfcd7259852564820068dc6d/85256a220056c2a485256bb20068000d!OpenDocument>.

<sup>4</sup> Industry Canada Information Bulletin, "Canada Chairs Information and Communication Technologies for Development Meeting" May 7, 2002.

<http://www.ic.gc.ca/cmb/Welcomeic.nsf/261ce500dfcd7259852564820068dc6d/85256a220056c2a485256bb20068000d!OpenDocument>.

<sup>5</sup> DOT Force Statement on Linkages with UN ICT:

[http://www.dotforce.org/reports/statement\\_G8\\_DOTForce.html](http://www.dotforce.org/reports/statement_G8_DOTForce.html).

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.dotforce.org/reports/Summary\\_ConfCall\\_Feb\\_2002.doc](http://www.dotforce.org/reports/Summary_ConfCall_Feb_2002.doc).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.iis.ru/dotforce/index.en.html>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.globalknowledge.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.iis.ru/dotforce/forum/archive1/threads.ru.html>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.iis.ru/dotforce/events/events.en.html>.