

WSIS THEMATIC MEETING, 23-24 JUNE 2005, SEOUL, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

# Partnerships to bridge the digital divide



Credit: ITU

At the invitation of International Telecommunication Unit (ITU) Secretary-General, Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, and the Minister of Information and Communications (MIC) of the Republic of Korea, Dr Dae-je Chin, and with the close co-operation of the Korea Agency for Digital Opportunity (KADO), a WSIS Thematic Meeting on Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Bridging the Digital Divide was held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, from 23-24 June 2005. The purpose of the meeting was two-fold:

- to provide a showcase for successful multi-stakeholder partnerships from around the world, and
- to develop a methodology for monitoring the digital divide through a composite 'digital opportunity index'.

Some 125 participants from 36 countries participated in the meeting. The participants were welcomed by Mr. Hun-Hyong Rho, Vice-Minister of Information and Communication, Republic of Korea and Dr Tim Kelly, Head of the Strategy and Policy Unit, ITU. They explained the background to the meeting in the context of the overall WSIS preparation process for the Tunis Phase and of the 'Digital Bridges Initiative', which is jointly-run by ITU, MIC and KADO. In particular, this meeting is part of the planned implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action, which is one of the three areas of focus of the Tunis Phase. In the Plan of Action, each country is urged to have at least one multi-stakeholder partnership or public/private partnership to announce at the Tunis Phase, as a basis for future action.

In the opening ceremony, opening remarks were presented by Mr. Yeon-gi Son, President/CEO of KADO, the host of the meeting; Mr. Hak-su Kim, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic

and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), which had hosted the Asian regional meeting in Teheran, 31 May – 2 June 2005; and Mr. Othman Jerandi, Ambassador of Tunisia to the Republic of Korea, the host country of the Tunis Phase of the Summit. This meeting is an opportunity to enhance cooperation and mutual understanding between multiple actors working on bridging the digital divide. Among the new initiatives announced at the meeting was the establishment of an ICT Training Centre for the Asia-Pacific region in the Republic of Korea with initial funding of over US\$10m for the first five years. It was also stressed that the second phase of WSIS should be a 'Summit of Solutions'.

The meeting approved the nomination of Dr Michael Reed, Director of the International Institute for Software Technology, United Nations University, Macao, to chair the meeting and adopted the draft agenda. The keynote speakers provided the relevant background to the understanding of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

## Measuring and monitoring the digital divide

The second area of focus of the conference was on measuring and monitoring the digital divide. The background document entitled "Measuring digital opportunity" (BDB-WSIS/06) was presented by Mr Michael Minges (TMG). In the first phase of WSIS, in 2003, the need was identified for the creation of a composite "digital opportunity index" DOI (WSIS Plan of Action Para 28a). This index would provide a statistical tool for international evaluation and benchmarking of the objectives, goals, and targets of WSIS action plans.

Among the conclusions in this session were that any reasonable measure of ICT infrastructure should include mobile devices, and that number of Internet hosts was an unreliable measure. It was argued that good measurements were essential to guide policy and to identify opportunities in the developing world. The NSF example showed how policy could be driven by measurements, and that desired results could be obtained with modest funding and through multi-stakeholder partnerships in contrast to top-down direction by governments. It was proposed that the NSF example would provide a useful model for connecting unconnected villages in developing countries. It was agreed that measurements showed that the digital divide is shrinking but at a slow rate and that urgent policy action is needed. Finally the ambitious suggestion was made that the international community pick a pilot nation in the developing world and build a quality ICT infrastructure in that nation to establish a template for global use. ■