United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Aide Memoire

Capacity Building Programme for Diplomats:
Strengthening Capacity on E-government and ICT Policy

New York, June 2003
AIDE MEMOIRE

BACKGROUND

The advent of Information Society is creating unprecedented conditions for access to, and exploitation of information and represents a potential turning point in the ways in which societies are governed, administered and public services delivered. International decisions about information and communication technology (ICT) have far reaching implications for developing countries. Yet developing countries are poorly represented when agendas are set and decisions made. Often it is because developing countries—although present at meetings—lack the capacity to analyse issues, prepare positions, and advance their interests.

Three important international policy declarations were adopted in the year 2000—the G8 Okinawa Charter on the Information Society—which established the DOT force; The ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration on the Role of Information Technology in the Context of a Knowledge-Based Global Economy; and the United Nations Millennium Declaration. These declarations foreshadowed the decision taken in January 2002 to convene a two-phase World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005. As a result of these initiatives, it is clear that ICT has moved from the fringes of the international development agenda to its centre.

The forthcoming “World Summit on the Information Society”, which will take place in two phases (Geneva, December 2003, and Tunis, 2005), points out the international community’s readiness to improve initiatives which enhance the role of ICT for political, cultural and economic development, and will provide a good opportunity to take stock of progress made in achieving the goal of an inclusive global information society. The summit will specifically explore the benefits and challenges associated with e-government and examine best practices in new ICT based modes of interaction between government and its citizens.

In response to these new imperatives, the «UN ICT-Task Force» was established in November 2001. The objective of the Task Force is to provide leadership and coordination in ICT for development by working through multi-stakeholder partnerships. It has been working to establish and provide a global forum for integrating ICT into developing programmes and addresses such issues as strategy, infrastructure, enterprise, human capacity, content, application, partnerships, and policy and governance issues related to the digital revolution at the regional and international levels, facilitating the effective participation of all. In addressing these issues, the Task Force has established thematic Working Groups and Regional ICT Networks.

The «Digital Opportunities Task Force (DOT Force)», established at the G8 Summit in Okinawa, also represented a new model of international cooperation in the area of ICT. Following the G8 Summit in Genoa (2001), the DOT Force was endorsed to implement the “Genoa Plan of Action”, to broaden the
understanding that ICT is an effective instruments to reduce poverty and for spurring sustainable development.

In addition to these initiatives, the International Conference on e-Government for Development, (Palermo, Italy, 10-11 April 2002), organized by the Government of Italy with the support of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), raised awareness of the opportunities offered by e-government in the process of economic and social development, exploring the use of ICT technologies to foster democracy, efficiency and transparency.

A “Policy Awareness and Training in Information Technology Series” was launched in 2002 in accordance with the mandate given to the United Nations ICT Task Force for the development of a Policy and Training Programme for Ambassadors and Diplomats at the United Nations, and under the auspices of the ECOSOC Working Group on Informatics. The series is aimed at the training of diplomats accredited to the United Nations, as well as at Civil Servants in Member States. The series aims at enabling diplomats to acquire specific computer and Internet navigation skills, to raise awareness and understanding of policy and security issues, and to provide input for preparation for the World Summit for Information Society to be held in 2003 and 2005.

The initiatives mentioned above are designed to make an effective and original contribution disseminating information about ICT, including e-Government, its programming and implementation in countries which have not, or have only partially, exploited the full potential of ICT for development and for narrowing the economic and social divide. Italy has taken a major stride in the use of information technology in governance and has also been a major supporter of international efforts ensuring that these technologies are more widely available to other parts of the world.

Resolution 50/225 on Public Administration and Development adopted by the General Assembly in 1996 requested, inter-alia, strengthening of Government capacity for policy development, administrative restructuring, civil service reform, human resources development and public administration training. Pursuant to this resolution, and conscious of the role played by diplomats in policy making and implementation at the supra-national level when proposing and negotiating agreements in international fora, in 2001 DESA launched the “Capacity Building Programme for Diplomats” from developing countries and countries with economies in transition. In its first series the programme aimed at strengthening the diplomat’s knowledge and negotiating skills in the area of international trade and small enterprise development policy. Two training courses were held in 2001: for 28 participants from seven countries in the Mediterranean Basin (Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan); and for 27 participants from nine counties in Central and South America (Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru).

This is a proposal for successor capacity building activities that DESA carried out in 2001. In 2001 the “Capacity Building Programme for Diplomats” aimed at strengthening the diplomat’s knowledge and negotiating skills in the area of international trade and small enterprise development policy. The proposed 2003
series will refocus on e-government and ICT policy. In 2001 training sessions were held for participants from selected Mediterranean and Central and South American countries. The 2003 sessions will involve participants from selected Eastern European, African and Caribbean countries.

JUSTIFICATION

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) provides a powerful tool to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Indeed, the Millennium Declaration and its Road Map directly call on governments and the international community to pursue the building of the knowledge infrastructure, particularly ICT, through creative partnerships. Moreover, the “mainstreaming” of ICT within planning and design of development strategies is pivotal, both at national and regional level. In the context of the Millennium Declaration’s focus on good government goals, e-government becomes a particularly important ICT application.

Decisions about information and communication technology made by international bodies frequently have major implications for developing and transition countries. However, these bodies do not always consider developing country needs and take them into account. Sometimes this is because developing country representatives are not present when agendas are set and decisions made. Often it is because developing countries—although present at meetings—lack the capacity to analyse issues, prepare positions, and advance their interests.

It is not possible to strengthen participation by developing countries and those with economies in transition in international ICT decision making fora without first strengthening their capacity to make and implement ICT policy at the national and regional levels. Lack of policy awareness is a most significant barrier to developing country’s participation in international ICT decision-making. Moreover, lack of technical and policy capacity on ICT issues is viewed as a fundamental obstacle to effective participation by developing countries, particularly with respect to emerging issues such as the e-government, e-commerce, the migration from circuit-switched to IP-based networks, and the implementation of third generation mobile communication systems.

The progressive use of Information and Communication Technologies in the economic and social development process reveals the need for adequate and appropriate knowledge-based capabilities for diplomats who participate in the vast number of international meetings and fora on ICT. Utmost amongst these is the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society in December 2003, which necessitates that developing countries are able to effectively voice their needs, concerns and to influence negotiations on the Summit’s final Declaration and Action Plan, particularly in those areas concerned with e-government and e-governance.

For all these reasons, and especially in view of the immediate need to better prepare developing countries to participate in the WSIS process, UNDESA decided to refocus the 2003 series of its “Capacity Building Programme for Diplomats” on e-government and ICT policy and work to establish and support effective universal participation in international ICT decision making fora. The
programme aims at helping to build the policy and technical capacity of a select number of developing countries and countries with economies in transition, through the participation of a number of middle-level diplomats from each country in a two-week training workshop.

In this view, the intent of the present programme is to ensure that diplomats from Eastern European, African and Caribbean states acquire the necessary knowledge on ICT policies and applications in the economic, social, governmental and cultural spheres to respond to the compelling international call for standards of accountability, transparency and participatory governance. In fact, access to, and effective use, at national level, of the tools and networks that Information and Communications Technologies make possible, are critical to poverty reduction and increased social inclusion.

OBJECTIVES

The programme has two main objectives:

1. A long-term objective, which is to strengthen the participation of developing countries and countries with economies in transition in international ICT decision-making. The participation aimed at in this programme is not mere membership or simple attendance at meetings. It is active engagement in the whole decision making process—which includes identifying issues, setting agendas, conducting policy research and analysis, formulating positions, building coalitions, negotiating with other stakeholders, implementing results and applying them within national ICT and development contexts. Because of its nature, in the long term the programme will contribute to bridge the digital divide.

2. A short-term objective, which is to provide diplomats from developing countries with the tools to strengthen their negotiation skills, in order to facilitate their participation in international negotiations on ICT policies.

ACTIVITIES

The programme envisages training/learning activities for diplomatic representatives of selected Eastern European, Latin American and Caribbean countries in three phases. The training/learning activities will have a duration of two weeks for each phase. One of the two weeks will be held in Rome and conducted by UNDESA in collaboration with UNITAR and with the participation of the relevant UN Economic Commissions (ECE, ECA and ECLAC), the UN ICT Task Force and the Italian Diplomatic Institute. The Rome-based week of training will cover ICT concepts, issues, initiatives, strategies and applications at national, regional, international and local levels, including e-government. The other week of training will be held at the ILO International Training Center in Turin and will be organized by DESA in collaboration with ILO. This Turin-based week of training will cover communication and negotiations techniques, with special reference to international ICT negotiations.
CONTENT OF THE ROME-BASED WEEK OF TRAINING/LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The Rome-based week of training will consist of nine modules, seven of which will be conducted by UNITAR and two by DESA. Each module will comprise one-half day session on the following topics: concepts and issues of the information society, international initiatives and organizations, regional initiatives and organizations, international internet governance (laws and institutions), national ICT strategies and action plans, ICT applications, security issues, national and regional e-government strategies and action plans, and e-government applications. This session will devote special attention to the themes of the World Summit on Information Technology and its process.

CONTENT OF THE TURIN-BASED WEEK OF TRAINING/LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The programme of this week of training envisages 3 modules of 1 day and ½ each on the following topics: media, communication and negotiations. Topics of the modules will include media and diplomacy, media interaction, communication and diplomacy, strategic communication, delivery of press conferences/press releases, and current negotiation techniques, with special reference to international ICT negotiations. The methodological approach will usually follow the one of a lecturette followed by an application or exercise.

WORKING LANGUAGE

English (if requested, interpretation will be provided into French).

PARTICIPANTS

Target participants are middle-level diplomats who are involved in the international ICT decision-making process, especially the preparation for the WSIS. The participants will be identified among Eastern European, African and Caribbean states, as follows:

Phase I: Three diplomats for each of the following Eastern European countries (total 24 participants): Albania, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Georgia, Serbia-Montenegro and Ukraine.

Phase II: Three diplomats for each of the following African countries (total 30 participants): Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Namibia, Mozambique and Sudan.

Phase III: One or two diplomats for each of the following countries in the Caribbean region (total 30 participants): Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago.

For each country, one participant will be a diplomat from the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva or New York.
DATES

Preliminary dates of the capacity building activities are as follows:

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<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Eastern Europe</th>
<th>16-27 June 2003</th>
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<td>Phase II</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>30 June-11 July 2003</td>
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<td>Phase III</td>
<td>The Caribbean</td>
<td>20 – 31 October 2003</td>
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In any event, the two phases of training will take place before the World Summit on the Information Society (December 2003).

OUTPUTS

The diplomats selected to participate in this training programme should be able by the end of their training:

- To effectively participate in the WSIS process
- To support their countries by negotiating significant ICT agreements
- To advance existing best practices and models
- To promote and stimulate international and bilateral trade agreements

IMPLEMENTATION MODALITIES

Participants will be selected by UNDESA-DPADM with the support of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of the selected countries. The Permanent Missions will be responsible for collecting candidatures and submitting them to UNDESA.

The project will be implemented by UNDESA with the cooperation of UNITAR, ILO, the relevant UN Economic Commissions (ECE, ECA and ECLAC), the UN ICT Task Force, and the Italian Diplomatic Institute.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION...

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