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Internet

Book section

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RICHARD PEET

international organizations and associations

International organizations and associations take many forms, and are an important part of the local-global dialog in development processes. Though their mandate inherently stretches beyond national borders, international organizations operate at several different scales. International organizations at the level of the world system of nation-states include institutions such as the **United Nations** and its various agencies, the Organization of American States, and the **World Bank**. They can also be seen in private sector organizations including the World Business Council on Sustainable Development and more industry-specific groupings such as the Global Mining Initiative. While ostensibly local in nature, **civil society** networks and **non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** have also become increasingly internationalized, with groups such as the International Rivers Network and the Third World Network advocating **sustainable development** and **social justice** issues across a variety of global situations. Other organizations that are international in scope include religious **charities**, professional and academic associations and **trade unions**.

See also: multilateral development banks (MDBs); non-governmental organizations (NGOs); United Nations; World Bank

PABLO SHILADITYA BOSE

Internet

The Internet is a set of protocols or standards developed in the USA during the 1970s. Supported by the Department of Defense, initially Internetworking was for use by the scientific research **community**. The protocols function to transport packets of digital information from one computer to another.

The global spread of the Internet in the 1990s means that there is a potential for people in developing countries to communicate and exchange information with each other and with those in the industrialized countries very rapidly and at relatively low cost. Many policy-makers and donor agencies have assumed that simple access to the Internet and the use of electronic mail or the World Wide Web will offer a new means to tackle problems of uneven social and **economic development** and **poverty**. The Internet can be used to provide a platform for online services ranging from **health, education**, and government to electronic business services. However, effective use of the Internet to address development problems requires that many social, cultural, economic and infrastructure conditions be in place.

Access to the Internet requires a robust and reasonably reliable fixed or mobile **telecommunications** network and a reliable electricity supply to run a computer and software applications. Use of the Internet enables people to access vast stocks of digital information that are available globally, and to create and exchange information about local conditions. However, even where such access is achieved, capabilities ranging from literacy, language facility, **information technology** skills, skills for managing social and technical networks, and educational attainment levels must be developed. This is essential if local or global sources of digital information are to be converted into useful knowledge by Internet users.

Internet applications such as electronic mail, electronic commerce and electronic government require legislative frameworks with respect to privacy protection, commercial practices, electronic payment systems, protection of **intellectual property rights (IPRs)** and many other issues. There are strong pressures from the industrialized

countries and from intergovernmental agencies to adopt legislative frameworks that are being implemented in the wealthier countries. However, there are sound reasons for developing countries to develop their own strategies toward the spread of Internet access. Legislative frameworks need to be developed in the light of their economic resources, distinctive **local knowledge** bases and cultural practices, and priorities for improved **governance** and social and **economic development**.

Public-private partnerships are being used to encourage growth in the numbers of Internet subscribers in developing countries and there is a growing number of entrepreneurs who offer Internet access. By 2002, however, in Africa although 1 in 13 people had a television, only 1 in 150 people (a total of 5.5 million) had access to the Internet. Many foresee a growing “digital divide.” Public forms of Internet access via kiosks, cybercafes, **community** tele-centers, and other organizations are expanding in developing countries. However, the monthly cost of Internet access is often far in excess of monthly average per capita income. Access is highly skewed in favor of urban areas, and it may be subject to government censorship controls.

National and regional initiatives to promote the use of the Internet to support social and economic development offer opportunities that may enable **civil society** organizations, private-sector firms and governments to take advantage of electronic trading and to strengthen democratic processes. However, growing use of the Internet in developing countries also raises issues of the effects of electronic surveillance, erosion of the taxation base, and reliance on foreign educational and entertainment content. Because the Internet has grown most rapidly in the industrialized countries, the distribution of costs and revenues associated with service supply is slowing the spread of the Internet in many poorer countries. The Internet is one component of a complex digital technology system. Its spread may enable people in developing countries to achieve their social and economic development goals, but the Internet is only a tool for development. The goals of development must shape local and national access to the Internet if it is to be used in ways that are beneficial to the majority of people in developing countries.

See also: information technology; media; telecommunications; World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

Further reading

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ROBIN MANSELL

intrahousehold allocations

Intrahousehold allocations refer to the differences that occur *within* households concerning the distribution of resources. The concept developed to challenge the sometimes-dominant view that households can be treated *as if* they were acting as an individual or single unit, and hence are the most logical unit for **targeting** policy, as well as the logical unit of consumption and, in many developing country contexts, of production. By default, this idea underlies much of policy made in developing countries today.

This unitary notion of the household has been problematized over time. Work within economics added the notions of bargaining power and a more general collective decision-making process. These concepts raise issues such as the differential impact of targeting men versus women for social policy (see **gender; women-headed households**). These models all assume that households are Pareto efficient in the allocation of resources (i.e. that no one can be made better off without making someone worse off), an assumption that has been questioned theoretically through the development