

Information and Communication Technology for Africa

A speech by MEP Deva

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you this lunchtime for this briefing on Satellites for Development in Africa. I am also delighted to share with you some of my thoughts on Development in Africa, with particular reference to Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

As you are all aware, in recent years, many African countries have made progress in political and economic development.

Nevertheless Africa still faces serious challenges. More than 314 million Africans live on less than \$1 a day—nearly twice as many as in 1981. The continent is home to 34 of the world's 48 poorest countries and 24 of the 32 countries ranked lowest in human development. The HIV/AIDS pandemic costs Africa 1 percentage point of per capita growth a year, while malaria kills about 2,800 Africans a day.

As we all now realize, the world is a large family, and it is becoming globalized. The peace and development of one country or one continent influences all the others. Africa ought to be cared about and assisted by the whole international community, which includes the European Union.

Europe and Africa are bound together by history, and by a shared vision of a peaceful, democratic and prosperous future for all their peoples. This is the future I have in mind in all my work on the Development Committee of the European Parliament, where I am the Budget Rapporteur, and when I meet with my colleagues on the Joint Parliamentary Assembly of the ACP.

The EU strategy on Africa sets out the steps the EU will take from now to 2015 to help Africa to build a better future.

The primary aims of the strategy are the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the promotion of sustainable development. This is crucially dependent on security and good governance in Africa.

I believe ICT can assist in achieving all these aims.

The Millennium Development Goals,

For eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, ICT can increase access to market and weather information and reduce transaction costs for poor farmers and traders. ICT can increase efficiency, competitiveness and market access of African countries. Also ICT can enhance ability of African countries to participate in the global economy and to exploit comparative advantages in factor costs (particularly skilled labour)

For achieving universal primary education, ICT can increase the supply of trained teachers through ICT-enhanced and distance training of teachers, and also through networks that link teachers to their colleagues. Also, ICT can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education ministries and related bodies through the strategic application of technologies and ICT-enabled skill development. Moreover, ICT broadens the availability of quality educational materials and resources, to ensure that, by 2015 most of the children in Africa will be able to complete a full course of quality primary schooling.

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For promoting gender equality and to empower women, ICT can deliver educational and literacy programs specifically targeted to poor girls and women. ICT can influence public opinion on gender equality through information and communication programs.

For reducing child mortality, ICT can enhance the delivery of basic and in-service training for health workers, increase monitoring and information sharing on disease and famine, increase access to reproductive health information, including information on AIDS prevention, through local content in their own languages. ICT can help to improve maternal health and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases,

For ensuring environmental sustainability, ICT can deliver remote sensing technologies and communications networks to permit more effective monitoring, resource management, and mitigation of environmental risks.

ICT can increase awareness of sustainable development strategies in areas such as agriculture, sanitation, water and waste management, and in the extractive industries.

ICT can supply greater transparency and monitoring of environmental abuses and can assist in the enforcement of environmental laws.

ICT can facilitate knowledge exchange and networking among policymakers, practitioners and advocacy groups.

If we all work together we will be able to halve the number of people in Africa without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015. Also we can achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Security and Peace Building in Africa,

Africa in many people's eyes is an unstable continent, afflicted by war much more than any other continent in recent years. Africa has been marred by more than 20 major civil wars since 1960. Rwanda, Somalia, Angola, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Burundi are among those countries that have recently suffered serious armed conflict.

War has made food production impossible in the conflict areas, and it often results in serious famine. Widespread conflict has condemned many of Africa's children to lives of misery, if they survive at all.

Nutrition and education programs cannot succeed in a nation at war. Billions of dollars of development assistance have been virtually wasted in war-ravaged countries.

To stop war is extremely important for Africa, for no country at war is able to achieve development.

For stopping war and building a peaceful Africa, ICT can play important roles in conflict prevention, conflict management, and post-conflict building.

In Conflict Prevention ICT can help to address the root causes of conflicts, increase the visibility of potential conflicts, and promote better communication and dialogue. Also, ICT can help to reveal human rights abuses and promote good governance.

In Conflict Management ICT can make logistics more efficient, raise the profile of forgotten conflicts, and contribute to the coordination of civil society organizations and to information sharing between them.

In Post-Conflict building, ICT can serve as vector and catalyst of national reconciliation. It can help to disseminate terms of ceasefire agreements, and raise public awareness of war crimes tribunals and national reconciliation commissions. ICT can contribute to the rapid establishment of a modern state.

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Good Governance

ICT can help to improve the quality of the governance process.

In a civil society, a well-informed citizen is in a better position to exercise his or her rights and carry out responsibilities within the community.

ICT can permit a limitless number of individuals and organizations to have direct access to a global audience. It leads to transparency and reinforces public faith in institutions.

ICT can also be applied to build E-Governance, which is the public sector's use of ICT with the aim of improving information and delivering services, encouraging citizens' participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective. Moreover, ICT can reduce communication costs for accessing services, reduce corruption, and help citizens to learn about policies and processes.

The Millennium Development Goals, Security and Peace Building, and Good Governance are all in need of ICT. Without applying ICT, we could not help Africa efficiently and effectively. And I am afraid, much of the EU budget for Africa would be wasted, because so much money would be lost and stolen. And African people would never realize their dream.

We can use ICT to cooperate with other international organizations and countries to better assist Africa for its development, and to realise the last goal of MDG- creating a global partnership for development.

The EU is not alone in this endeavour – we work closely with the aid programmes of the United States, and more recently with China.

China has abolished tariffs for the 25 most underdeveloped African nations, and has offered US\$50 million to the Africa Development Fund to help fight poverty. In July this year China made a 500,000-U.S.-dollar donation to help save African babies.

Hopefully, the EU, the United States and China will use ICT in the coming years to cooperate even more effectively together to help Africa.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am no doubt that the first responsibility for the welfare of Africa rests upon Africans themselves, but we in the international community can and will help them, with the aid of modern technology, to realise their dream of a peaceful and prosperous continent with opportunity for all its people.