**DIVISION OF COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION**

ICT IN AFRICA – INFORMATION SHEET N4

## ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) makes an enormous difference for the vast majority of Africans. However, ICT and economic growth poverty alleviation, promotion of social equality and adequately addressing MDG's can only happen within certain policy regimes and institutional arrangements. In order to harness ICT for sound economic and social policies, continental and national ICT strategies must be integrated into broader policy agendas and coordinated with different policy sectors, most notably Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSP).

Nevertheless, affordability offers one of the most generic perspectives to analyze how ICT is meeting the challenges of development. Falling prices on products and services is key for delivering ICT products and services for low-income people. Affordability is also a centre piece of policy strategies advancing mass penetration of ICT's throughout African society, especially in rural local communities or among the urban poor. Pushing the prices of products and services in new generation telephony, computing and internet below the affordability thresholds for the majority of Africans presents great potential to contribute to poverty alleviation and welfare.

Alignment of ICT with poverty alleviation and other MDGs requires concerted actions of the governments, private sector, NGOs, and especially the end-users of applications and services themselves. The most important innovations advancing adoption and the value of mobile telephony among the African low-income groups has been the introduction of pre-paid mobile phone services, which is today used by almost 97 percent of African subscribers. Other similar innovations are Short Message Service (SMS) based payments for various services, mobile banking services, market information systems, alert systems, and increasingly other services in weather, education, health, and government services. Wider adoption of 3rd generation mobile phones will expand the opportunities for service innovations offered on mobile platforms.

Village phone systems, community ICT and internet centers, microfinance programmes for telecommunication equipment and the like are boosting the take-up of ICT among the low-income groups, as well as promoting digital literacy and inclusion. Open source programs and software platforms have brought advanced computing to a host of users, especially virtual learning environments to schools, higher education institutions, as well as community training centers.

ICT is also increasingly important for meeting climate change challenges globally. ICT accounts for 2.5 percent of total greenhouse emissions, but has the potential to reduce overall emissions greatly in Africa. ICT has the potential to reduce the need for travel, which accounts worldwide for about 14% of greenhouse emissions. Introduction of intelligent ICT into energy management and monitoring systems provides another highly potential contribution to energy efficiency and environmentally sustainable development.

Africa needs to take anticipatory action in electronics waste management and recycling. This involves coordinated prevention of transfer of hazardous electronic waste to Africa from elsewhere in the world.