

UN-GAID Preparatory Meeting Endorses the MDG eNabler

(1-2 September 2010, New York)

If there is one enabler that can accelerate achievement of the MDGs, it is ICT. And if there is one Force needed to ensure that achievement, it is the patronage of the United Nations Secretary-General

Talal Abu-Ghazaleh
Chairman, UN-GAID

The United Nations Global Alliance for ICT and Development (UN-GAID) Preparatory Meeting held on 1-2 September 2010 reviewed the progress in the creation of the **MDG eNabler** – an initiative on building “a one-stop shop” for helping Governments and other development practitioners use ICT for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This Project was conceived at the GAID Annual Meeting held in September 2009 in Monterrey, Mexico. In February 2010, the Board of the Alliance approved the project as the paramount focus of work of the Alliance for 2010 and beyond. The initiative was endorsed by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The Preparatory meeting, chaired by Mr. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh, the Chairman of UN-GAID, was attended by over 140 participants representing 44 countries, as well as UN agencies, the private sector, civil society and academia. It was a truly multi-stakeholder event with 29% participants representing governments, 20% business, 16% civil society, 14% UN agencies and 10% representing other international organization.

In his opening remarks, United Nations Under-Secretary-General **Cheick Sidi Diarra**, Special Adviser on Africa and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, stated that the Project is particularly encouraging for progress towards the achievement of the MDGs in Africa and other developing countries, given that a major reason that poorer countries are lagging behind in the pursuit of the Goals is their lack of easily accessible information to enhance development. He suggested that the Project could consider including a feature which tracks the performance of African countries, the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS in their endeavors to reach their goals. This disaggregating exercise would afford retrieval of pertinent information so that we can closely monitor and advocate more effectively on behalf of these vulnerable groups of countries as we progress towards 2015. Mr. Diarra also mentioned that the Project could serve as a useful blueprint for the development of country-specific portals of a similar nature. Mr. Diarra concluded his statement by stating his confidence that the Project will provide fresh ideas and guidance for development

practitioners, and that he looked forward to working closely with GAID and all stakeholders in its development.

In his video message, His Highness **Prince Hassan** of Jordan expressed support for the work being done by UN-GAID and emphasised the importance of a long-term, comprehensive and integrated view of world development, taking into account the rapid pace of change in technologies and societies.

H.E. Mr. **Ivo Ivanovski**, Minister of Information Society of the Republic of Macedonia, addressed the audience in a video message and reiterated his country's support to the project. Minister Ivanovski stressed the importance of ICT in the growth and progress of his country and highlighted the continuous challenges he encountered due to the fragmented information channels available. He emphasized the need for a "system" that could consolidate the wealth of information, projects and best practices available around the world and offer Governments the tools and practical connections to implement projects faster and at lower cost.

Amb. Francis Lorenzo, of the International organization for *South-South* Cooperation, applauded the initiative and stressed again the importance of this product for the developing world, which so often are lacking the access to ICT necessary for successful and sustainable development.

The MDG eNabler

In his introductory remarks, the Chairman welcomed all participants to the meeting and expressed his gratitude to all those who had worked on this project and had supported it. He recalled that the concept of the MDG eNabler, called at that time the Matrix of ICT Solutions for MDG Advancement, was presented by him together with GAID leadership to the United Nations Secretary-General as an implementation vehicle for advancing the MDGs and was endorsed by the Secretary-General.

In the past few months, the concept has rapidly taken shape as a real web-based innovation. Extensive on-line and physical consultations with all stakeholders fed the work, including at the WSIS Forum in Geneva, a Gulf Cooperation Council Regional Seminar in Riyadh and a Country Seminar in Bahrain. A regional seminar is planned to be held in Damascus, Syria in November 2010. The MDG eNabler received overwhelming universal support as a virtual but strategic set of tools and resources, a truly multi-stakeholder project. The MDG eNabler draws on the experience and expertise of government officials, the private sector, civil society and a multitude of international organizations and diverse development practitioners, and unlike other initiatives, it is not just a knowledge repository but rather a set of tools that converts raw data and information into useful and user-specific knowledge to help development practitioners address various development challenges.

These unique features make the MDG eNabler the first of its kind, a potent instrument in advancing progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The Chairman proposed to change the working name of the Project – “MDG eCenter” – to “MDG eNabler” (the 'e' stands for both "electronic" and "enabler") noting that ICTs are by definition an *enabler*, and emphasized that this Project will remain the main focus and objective of UN-GAID in the coming years. Mr. Abu-Ghazaleh outlined a timeline for the implementation of the Project, starting with a working prototype that was subsequently presented at the Preparatory Meeting, continuing with a presentation at the High-Level Breakfast on 21 September 2010 in the context of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on MDGs and then at the Annual Meeting of UNGAID later this year, leading towards the launch of the fully operational online set of tools early in 2011.

Following the presentation of the main components of the MDG eNabler – the Matrix of ICT Solutions and the Strategic Planner, the meeting engaged in intensive, interactive and lively discussions on all aspects of the initiative, with over thirty speakers taking the floor. The concepts and objectives of the project received overwhelming support and endorsement from all participants who applauded the progress that had been made in its development over the short period of time. In particular, strong statements of support were made by representatives of relevant government entities of Bahrain, Brazil, Cuba, Germany, Egypt, India, Italy, Jordan, Liberia, Macedonia, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Oman and Syria, as well as private sector, civil society and academia representatives from Portugal, Russia, Turkey and the Republic of Korea. Official representatives of the African Union Commission, International Chamber of Commerce, GCC, League of Arab States, WITSA, ESCWA, UNCTAD, FAO, WFP, La Francophonie, and such leading private sector actors as Intel, Ericsson, Microsoft, and Telefonica strongly supported the Project and expressed their interest in participating and supporting it.

Outcomes of the discussion

Notably, there was not a single objection to or negative comment about the Project. Participants offered numerous valuable suggestions and proposals to help refine, enhance and develop the Project in its next phase of development. Most salient points are outlined below.

1. The Project should draw upon and coordinate with other institutions and on-going activities, including development banks, UN Regional Commissions, InfoDev, Development Gateway's aid management platform, FAO's IMARK and eAgriculture Platform and CETI-D, among others.
2. Gender aspects should be adequately mainstreamed into the Project.
3. The energy and creativity of youth should be fully tapped for the development of the Project.
4. A social community approach and social networking tools should be employed to ensure sustainability and long-term development.
5. Marketing and outreach efforts to raise awareness about the Project should be scaled up significantly.

6. A simplified version of the Project should be developed with easy-to-use tools to enhance buy-in, confidence and capacity building; the Project's interface should be user-friendly.
7. A clear identification of the target audience for the Project should be made so that governments, development practitioners and end users could all make the best use of it.
8. The use of games and simulations in the Project to foster capacity building was strongly supported and it was suggested that this component should be further developed.
9. The large numbers of tools currently available in the area of ICT for development should be included in the resources of the Project.
10. GAID should coordinate and collaborate with other MDGs-related programmes and processes, including financial and field-oriented programmes, to ensure maximum uptake and use of the Project.
11. An information guide and an operational manual should be prepared.

Conclusions and Decisions

The following conclusions and decisions were adopted by consensus:

1. UN-GAID will have full ownership of the Project. The MDG eNabler will be built and maintained in full compliance with the relevant rules and regulations of the UN and its agencies.
2. The name "MDG eNabler" was adopted.
3. An advisory committee will be established for the management and further development governance of the MDG eNabler.
4. Thematic coordinators will be designated to cover specific MDGs sectors for the MDG eNabler. The support of the relevant United Nations agencies will be sought to lead the sectorial coordination.
5. Regional nodes will be set up in collaboration with the UN Regional Commissions to support the Project.
6. The MDG eNabler should be built and maintained in accordance with the principle of multi-lingualism.
7. UN-GAID will reach out to the broader global development stakeholder community to seek their commitment and participation.
8. A web-based social collaboration culture and tools will be developed to ensure sustainability and growth of the Project.
9. Increased financing support for the Project will be needed to ensure its sustainability. To this end, a five year budget will be developed.
10. Capacity-building and training programmes will be developed to enable governments and other institutions to make effective use of the Project.
11. The intellectual property ownership of the Project will be vested in GAID.
12. An annual progress report starting Dec 2010 through 2015 should be published.

Offers to support the development of the Project

1. African Union expressed the wish to participate in the project and to organize two regional meetings in the African continent.
2. Nigeria will organize a workshop to encourage African nations to synergize, collaborate and partner at a regional level.
3. Russia and CIS region are ready to establish a partnership to engage with the Project.
4. ICVolunteers offered its assistance via its network of volunteer workers around the world.
5. Bahrain invited the audience to the Bahrain International Forum, 16 May 2011, for a dedicated workshop on the Project to be organized in the framework of this Forum.
6. Korea University offered to provide academic support and to organize a session in Seoul, Korea in 2013-2014 in collaboration with UN-GAID.
7. Brazil offered to host a live launch of the Project during a LAC Regional Conference in Sao Paulo in March 2011, in conjunction with the launching of the Center of Excellence in Technology and Information for people with Disabilities (CETI-D) of the "Secretaria de Estado dos Direitos da Pessoa com Deficiencia".
8. Microsoft on its part offered its full technological, marketing and logistic support and invited the MDG eNabler technical team to its Campus for that purpose.
9. Brazil and Bahrain offered to co-host the MDG eNabler website.
10. G3ict offered to support the project by providing contents related to e-accessibility for persons with disabilities.

The Deputy Minister of Economy and Planning of Liberia provided an appropriate summary of the debate by saying that "this innovative initiative is long overdue. Its timing and execution is very crucial to become mainstream, successful and impactful".

Closing the meeting, the Chairman emphasized that in this Project stakeholders from the developed countries are working in partnership with colleagues from developing countries in a truly global multi-stakeholder partnership towards a shared goal of accelerating the pace of progress of the developing and the least developed countries towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.