



**A Process for Developing Internet Policy:  
The Model of the National ICT/Internet Summit  
April 2001**

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) can contribute to economic and human development. Nations around the world are eager to take advantage of this potential. An important first step is the adoption of a national policy to promote development and application of the Internet and other ICTs.

A national ICT strategy is best developed through a consultative process involving a wide range of stakeholders. This principle was recently demonstrated in the Kyrgyz Republic, where the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Global Internet Policy Initiative (GIPI) collaborated with the Government in co-sponsoring a process that included a national ICT strategy "summit." The process leading up to and continuing after the summit provides an important model for digital divide/digital opportunity efforts in other countries.

The process in Kyrgyzstan included these important elements:

- A series of working groups met over a period of months prior to the summit, bringing together civil society, corporations, and the government, to develop concrete recommendations for improving the ICT climate in the country.
- The process was co-sponsored by the UNDP, giving it international credibility, and the UNDP Resident Representative was personally involved in keeping the effort on track.
- A local GIPI expert working full-time on Internet policy provided crucial analytic and organizational assistance to the working groups, the UNDP, and the government.
- International experts were brought in at key junctures to provide outside perspective and advice, both with regard to policy substance and to facilitate the discussion and consensus-building.
- A public "summit" was held, with participation from the government at the highest levels, to obtain public comments on the working group recommendations and the government's draft strategy.
- The working groups and the government kept working together after the summit, to finalize and then implement the summit recommendations.

The event in Kyrgyzstan, formally called the "National Information and Communications Technologies for Development Summit," was held on February 27-28 in Bishkek. It was organized by the government of the Kyrgyz Republic, UNDP, UNDESA, and GIPI, through the NGO Internews (more below), with financial support from the Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan, USAID, Kyrgyztelecom, the ISP Elcat, and other corporations.

The summit was successful because it was NOT a mere conference. From the outset, the summit was planned as part of a broader effort to develop a national strategy for ICT development. In this spirit, nearly half of the event (most of the afternoon, each day) was devoted to dialogue, in which stakeholders and members of the public could speak. Participants received the draft national strategy prepared by the government and five papers prepared by the working groups. The working group papers served as input to the government draft, and the discussion sessions were focused on the specific findings and recommendations of the working groups. A summit website, <http://www.ict.kg> and <http://www.ict.kg/ict.php?lang=eng>, carried the working documents, and a mailing list facilitated communication among members of the working groups and other interested parties before and after the summit.

The process in Kyrgyzstan may not be relevant to all countries. Nonetheless, it is clearly a viable and important model. These were the key components of the process:

### **Working groups**

Effective policy development in any field must include a bottom-up, participatory process, bringing together local stakeholders in a consensus-building approach. This is all the more true of ICT and the Internet, where the private sector must take the lead. In Kyrgyzstan, the UNDP started this consultative process in November 2000, when it organized a series of working groups in four areas:

- Effective Public Management Through the Use of ICT
- Social Sector and Human Capital in the ICT Area
- Partnership Between Government, Private and Civic Sectors in the ICT Area
- Development of Telecomm Infrastructure, ICT, Software and Use of ICT

A cross-cutting category of issues -- creating the legal and regulatory environment for ICT development -- was addressed by each working group and resulted in a fifth report.

The specific number and subjects of the working groups is less important than the fact that they served to focus the attention of stakeholders on a set of concrete issues. Each working group began by preparing a detailed background paper that assessed the current situation in Kyrgyzstan. As the summit approached, each working group was tasked to prepare a resume of its findings and conclusions, along a common format.

### **UNDP/UNDESA**

The sponsorship of the UNDP and the UNDESA gave the process important credibility and objectivity. The UN institutions were able to preserve a sense of balance and a focus on a particular theme: how can ICT help the development process? Moreover, the UNDP's Resident Representative (ResRep) in the Kyrgyz Republic was personally involved and kept the process on track. Whenever the working groups seemed to be faltering in their interest, the UNDP ResRep personally called them together and got them working again. At the summit itself, the ResRep played a key role in ensuring that the summit would produce concrete recommendations, not merely a lot of talk. After the summit, the UNDP-KG

encouraged the working groups to finish their work and develop the necessary materials for implementation, a process that is ongoing.

### **Coalition-building, supported by a fulltime coordinator**

The Global Internet Policy Initiative (GIPI) is a joint project of the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) and Internews, launched to promote in developing countries adoption of the legal and regulatory framework that would support development of the Internet as an engine of economic growth, democratization and human development. GIPI is hiring local Internet policy coordinators in a number of countries coordinators who work fulltime fostering the establishment of working groups that can identify the impediments to Internet development, seek consensus around practical agendas for reform, and work collaboratively with the government , industry and civil society for the implementation of those reforms.

GIPI got off to an early start in the Kyrgyz Republic, where the GIPI coordinator is a highly respected and very skilled Kyrgyz lawyer who specializes in the field of Internet/media law. As the local GIPI coordinator, she devoted considerable time to the working groups and the summit, working closely with the UNDP ResRep to keep the working groups meeting regularly. Also, Internews was able to reach out to the NGOs and independent journalists from the traditional media, with whom it has good contacts throughout the country, and arranged for them to participate in the summit.

### **Outside Expertise**

The UNDP brought in several international experts, including Jim Dempsey of CDT/GIPI. A central role was played by Rafal Rohozinski, a consultant with extensive international experience in designing and managing UN/UNDP ICT programs. One of Rafal's main roles was to serve as facilitator. In the days immediately leading up to the summit, he directed the working groups to summarize their conclusions around a common format, working with them to take a disparate set of reports and distill them into a two page summary that summit participants could respond to meaningfully.

After the summit itself, Mr. Rohozinski continued to play the role of "mentor" and "advisor" to the working groups, helping them produce the final conference report -- which will consist of the finalized policy recommendations, summaries of the public discussions, and open questions raised by the summit.

### **Government**

The President's administration worked in advance of the summit to draft a national ICT strategy. In essence, the summit was a national consultation on the issue of promoting ICT and Internet development in Kyrgyzstan as a means of promoting economic, democratic and human development. The President of the Kyrgyz Republic gave the opening address in which he clearly signaled to all in the government that ICT development was a priority.

### **Conclusion**

In seeking to replicate this process, a few points should be kept in mind: The government should develop its draft strategy with the working groups. The membership of the working groups should be broad, and the NGO sector should be brought into the process at an early stage. Key Members of Parliament should be included in the working groups and in the summit. And most importantly, there should be follow-up the summit should be a stage in the process, not the end of the process.

The Kyrgyz Republic still faces huge challenges in exploiting the development potential of ICT, but the experience there demonstrates the degree to which the UNDP acting as a convenor and the Internews/CDT GIPI project providing staff support, policy advice and civil sector outreach can cooperate in supporting progressive Internet strategies in developing countries.

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