

Implications of the DOT Force and Genoa G-8 Summit on Youth Organizations and Networks

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Introduction:

In March 2001, the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) requested help from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) in compiling the input of youth from developing and transitional countries for inclusion in their report to the G-8 Digital Opportunities Taskforce (DOT Force) Secretariat. The report of the secretariat was accepted by the G-8 Summit in Genoa in July 2001, with the Canadian government agreeing to lead the follow-up work.

However, one month after the Genoa summit there are still many unanswered questions remaining. To what degree were youth concerns and ideas included into the GKP report to the DOT Force Secretariat? How many of these ideas were incorporated into the final G8 DOTforce report and Action Plan? What are the implications for youth groups in terms of access to funding and continued input to digital divide initiatives? This report briefly addresses these issues and summarizes the implications of the DOTforce processes and priorities.

Background:

The Youth DOTforce report built on earlier work conducted by the Global Knowledge Partnership's Youth Advisory Council (YAC). This group was formed in December 1999 to assist the GKP in learning from the expertise of young professionals around the world who are using ICTs to produce, disseminate and use knowledge for sustainable development. From January-March 2000, the advisory committee facilitated the Youth: Building Knowledge Societies (YBKS) e-conference¹ to collect youth perspectives on bridging the digital divide. The YAC presented its report at the Global Knowledge II Action Summit in March 2000.²

In July 2000, the DOT Force Secretariat was established at the G-8 Summit in Kyushu-Okinawa to address the widening digital divide. It began a year-long process including

¹ International Institute for Sustainable Development. *Youth: Building Knowledge Societies E-Conference*. <http://www.iisd.org/networks/ybks.htm>

² International Institute for Sustainable Development. *Youth: Building knowledge Societies: Final Report and Recommendations to the Global Knowledge Partnership*. http://www.iisd.org/pdf/ybks_report.pdf (8 March 2000).

formal plenary meetings, informal meetings, and public consultations, to develop concrete recommendations on how the G8 could contribute to creating digital opportunities for all.³ The GKP served as one of the primary conduits for civil society perspectives into the DOT Force process. Based on the quality of the youth input to the GKP Action Summit, in March 2001 the GKP asked IISD to reconvene the Youth Advisory Council to update the YBKS report within the framework of the DOT Force priorities:

- fostering policy, regulatory and network readiness
- improving connectivity, increasing access and lowering cost
- building human capacity
- encouraging participation in global e-commerce networks

YAC members from Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America researched youth initiatives identified in the YBKS report to determine which had flourished and which had disappeared over the course of the previous year. Their regional updates and perspectives were compiled into the Youth DOT Force report submitted to the GKP and DOT Force secretariats in April 2001.⁴

On 11 May 2001, the DOT Force Secretariat finalized its report “Digital Opportunities for All: Meeting the Challenge” including the Genoa Plan of Action.⁵ These documents were adopted at the G-8 Summit in Genoa, Italy from 20-22 July 2001. During the Summit, the Canadian government indicated that it would take the lead in guiding the follow-up from the DOT Force.⁶ The task of acting on the nine “Action Points” set out in the report is now underway.

Analysis:

Many of the issues raised by youth in our consultations converge with points of view reflected in the final DOT Force report. Whether these issues were already formulated by the DOT Force or were added in as a result of the GKP and youth consultations cannot be determined as the DOT Force report makes no explicit reference to either report..

The DOT Force youth report was summarized by eleven issues of concern. These issues are outlined below. Each is followed by a brief explanation of the relevance of the Genoa Action Plan to the issue and any corresponding Action Points (AP) from the G8 DOT Force Secretariat’s report.⁷ A brief outline of the DOT Force Action Points can be found in Appendix A.

³ *Digital Opportunities Taskforce: Addressing the Global Digital Divide*. <http://www.dotforce.org/>

⁴ International Institute for Sustainable Development. “Youth DOT Force Report.” <http://www.iisd.or/pdf/youthdotforce.pdf> (23 April 2001)

⁵ *Final Report of the Digital Opportunities Taskforce*. <http://www.dotforce.org/reports/> (11 May 2001).

⁶ “Canada Welcomes DOT Force Report.” *Prime Minister of Canada: News Releases*. http://www.pm.gc.ca/default.asp?Language=E&Page=newsroom&Sub=NewsReleases&Doc=dotforcereport.20010721_e.htm (21 July 2001)

⁷ References to Action Points (AP) use the numbering system from the *Final Report of the Digital Opportunities Taskforce* mentioned above. The final version of the Action Plan matrix (<http://www.glocom.ac.jp/dotforce/final/matrixrevised5-10.DOC>) is presented in a slightly different order.

1. *Young people desire to be active participants in governance. ICTs provide new opportunities for them to mobilize collectively and to establish networks and conduct advocacy campaigns from local to international levels.*

AP 1 recognizes the need to address issues of both eGovernment and eGovernance within national strategies. Overall, however, there is minimal mention of how ICTs are being used as tools for increasing the transparency and accountability of public decision-making processes.

2. *Young people believe that ICT access and training must be available for children. They seek greater educational and livelihood opportunities for the generation that follows them. While access to computers is a critical first step, this process requires a shift in the educational approach used by schools, extensive teacher training, and even a redesign of academic curriculums.*

This issue has been given considerable attention in the DOT Force report to the G-8. In AP 2 the establishment of ICT access points, such as, schools, Internet Cafés, community centers, etc., would also provide training opportunities. AP 3 aims at the establishment of Centres of Excellence for Technical Advice, Training Materials and eLearning Tools. These would promote ICT information/training to children in school and those marginalized, with an emphasis of girls. The G-8 wants to increase efforts from all over the world to help train teachers to better educate children in ICT. They also want to expand training in rural areas and distance learning. These initiatives would benefit for input from youth in order to better understand and carry out their goals.

3. *Youth networks and organizations can rarely sustain the costs of operating in an ICT-rich environment, but cannot be financially sustainable without the level of exposure and credibility that ICTs provide. Two actions are necessary: ICT training and support for youth agencies and networks as well as an increase in long-term partnerships between youth, government agencies, and other non-profit groups.*

This topic is not specifically addressed to youth agencies but will hopefully be covered under various aspects of the Action Plan. AP 9 aims to have ICT as a cross-cutting theme within all funding programs.

4. *Young people see great potential for improving development efforts and providing meaningful livelihood opportunities through the establishment of telecenters in both rural and urban areas. These telecenters provide livelihood opportunities for many young people.*

Initiative of Community Access Centres Network (AP 2) not only aims to improve connectivity, but set up ICT access points customized to the particular region. In order reduce costs, the G-8 is looking for private investment and open competition. The G-8 also encourages these centers to be also set up in rural areas where access to information has traditionally been difficult. Youth

organizations need to monitor where the investment comes from in order to access the funding for these initiatives.

5. *Young people use ICTs to seek information about education and livelihood opportunities available to them.*

This was partially addressed in the above comments. Community access centres could provide the ability to seek livelihood opportunities. However, no mention was made of how this type of content would be created and maintained.

6. *Young people appreciate the increased consultations on information technology policy and priorities.*

Though there are opportunities listed in the report for open participation in ICT policy formulation, none of them specifically include youth groups. AP 1 is aimed at developing e-strategies through an International e-Development Resource Network (IeRN); it states that IeRN should seek representation from all stakeholders involved in the process. AP 5 directs its attention to developing global ICT governance and the necessity of developing nations to share in the process. Also noted is that the United Nations ICT task force should assist developing nations with this issue. Importantly, they all mention the transparency and inclusion of interested stakeholders. Youth organizations should actively seek to become involved in these policy dialogues.

7. *Young people play a critical role in the development of locally appropriate content. Many work to repackaging information between old and new media types and to interpret it for local, national, and international audiences.*

AP 8 directly aims at supporting creation and efforts of local applications, content and heritage. The process would encourage the information to be done in local languages. It will also encourage participation of developing nations in the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) process.

8. *ICTs enable young people to explore and define their cultures within the context of rapid globalization.*

As in the point above there will be a concentrated effort to placing local heritage online for the public and an emphasis on using local languages. Not only will this help young people explore and define their cultures, but also it will certainly bring opportunities to be at the forefront of the efforts.

9. *ICT training provides a context for skill-development, socialization, and community-building for out-of-school or otherwise marginalized youth.*

As mentioned with issue 2, the DOT Force report will aim efforts at training and providing information for the marginalized youth and help expand ICT into rural areas. Youth initiatives and organizations should clearly step forward and to become the leaders in these efforts.

10. Local e-commerce may open more significant livelihood opportunities for young people than international e-commerce. Smaller scale e-commerce networks and ICT-enabled small and medium enterprises provide young people with the opportunity to develop professionally without having to relocate large distances from their families and support networks.

Although the G-8 is interested in international e-commerce as a long-term goal, they are also committed to support efforts for local programs as well. The initiative they propose is the International Entrepreneur Resource Exchange (IERE). The IERE would help encourage foreign investment, private sector mentoring to share best practices, create partnerships and create assistance programs.

11. Worldwide ICT-expansion has been possible due, in part, to the volunteer efforts and internship work of young professionals. Many have postponed or foregone potentially lucrative private sector jobs to train others in ICT use. These opportunities have further strengthened the skills of the young people as well as their commitment to socially-conscious uses of ICTs.

The DOT Force report does not directly address volunteer and internships and their contribution. However, assistance programs and commitments to invest more capital into efforts should increase opportunities for young people from developing regions to participate in ICT internship and volunteer activities.

Summary:

In the global information society, young people are often the leading innovators in the use and spread of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Increasingly, youth are adapting and using these technologies to meet local information and communication needs. But young people can remain an untapped resource if decision-makers do not integrate their knowledge, vision and experience. While the GKP recognizes these important contributions, youth organizations and networks must take a more proactive stance towards involvement with international digital divide processes.

Youth organizations and networks should continue to monitor G-8 DOT Force activities and partner with other GKP members on activities seeking to bridge the digital divide. The Action Plan framework shows which G-8 nation is the convener for each Action Point.⁸ As the “Champions” (private sector, governments, international development programs, etc.) come forth to put these initiatives in action, it will be easier to monitor and know where the opportunities will be.

In addition, global youth networks such as the World Assembly of Youth, TakingITGlobal/Global Youth Action Network, and Nation1 should include the digital divide as a topic of concern and joint action. This would allow young people to more easily identify partnership, funding, and influencing opportunities.

⁸ DOT Force (Genoa) Plan of Action: Framework for Implementation.
<http://www.glocom.ac.jp/dotforce/final/matrixrevised5-10.DOC>

Appendix A: G8 DOT Force Action Points

1. Help Establish and Support Developing Country & Emerging Economy National eStrategies
2. Improve Connectivity, Increase Access and Lower Costs
3. Enhance Human Capacity Development, Knowledge Creation and Sharing
4. Foster Enterprise and Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Economic Development
5. Establish and Support Universal Participation in Addressing New International Policy and Technical Issues raised by the Internet and ICT
6. Establish and Support Dedicated Initiatives for the ICT Inclusion of the Least Developed Countries
7. Promote ICT for Health Care and in Support Against HIV/AIDS and Other Infectious and Communicable Diseases
8. National and International Effort to Support Local Content and Applications Creation
9. Prioritize ICT in G8 and Other Development Assistance Policies and Programmes and Enhance Coordination of Multilateral Initiatives