

# Bridging the Gap



*As a communication tool,  
the internet can help communities overcome problems  
such as lack of basic infrastructure.*

The threat of the digital divide is visible even within developed countries, especially with regards to access between urban and rural areas, and between low income or otherwise disfavoured members of society. This phenomenon was first noticed in the US, closely followed by Western Europe.

Because ICT impacts employment, education, and access to information, an uneven growth of communications access and usage can have long-term adverse effects on the social and economic fabric of a country.

On the contrary, easy and fast access to the Internet in rural areas can help foster tele-working and tele-learning, stimulating local job creation and slowing the exodus from the countryside to overpopulated urban centres.

In his paper "Alcatel Digital Bridge Innovation", Alcatel's executive vice-president for Asia-Pacific, Christian Reinaudo said the Internet is seen as a prime communication tool offering useful end-user services.

A 'virtual' market place, the Internet allows for a business to be managed on real time. For example, price consultation by producers and traders as well as negotiations could be done on-line. Of course, the Internet will never completely replace the need for roads and trucks, but it can help the lack of many basic infrastructures such as transportation, healthcare, or education systems.

From an economic standpoint, ICT stimulates a more transparent and fair marketplace, where speculation and artificial shortages become a thing of the past. Time and money are saved, creating favourable conditions for a more dynamic economy. This, in turn, stimulates job creation and drives the need for a further improved communication infrastructure, bringing new benefits in the form of a 'virtuous development circle'.

Accordingly, using the Internet to support healthcare initiatives, education programmes and better governance policies also improves the communication and balance between governments and their citizens, between central and local authorities.

The ICT-based development model can be successful provided these two sources of investment - both private and public - flow together smoothly. In an ideal situation, public and private investors will co-finance the basic infrastructure, sharing the funding and the risks, while reaping the benefits together with the local population.



*Christian Reinaudo, Alcatel Executive Vice President for Asia-Pacific*

*About the speaker: Christian Reinaudo is Alcatel's executive vice president for Asia-Pacific, leading the company in its drive to capture growth in the Asia-Pacific as it reinforces its global leadership in telecommunications infrastructure, fixed and mobile broadband Internet, optical networking, and communications solutions. Reinaudo also oversees the strategic development of Alcatel Shanghai Bell, Alcatel's flagship Chinese company and the leading Chinese technology vendor, supplying one-third of the installed base in China.*

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