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## **ICT WIDENS HORIZONS FOR THIRD WORLD DEVELOPMENT**

### **UNIDO and UNDP Help SMEs and NGOs Narrow Information Divide at WSIS**

**Tunis, 18 November 2005** – ICT access and applications have come a step closer for small- and medium enterprises (SMEs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) here this week. As the focus of the joint United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiative “Sharing the Future”, during the World Summit on the Information Society (15-19 November 2005), 21 SMEs from private industry and 60 NGOs—representing a total of 60 countries worldwide—were able to claim a larger stake in the global information society.

SMEs, for example, held some 475 one-to-one negotiations with potential Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) partners, of which more than 100 are likely to lead to formal working relationships. In addition, three memoranda of understanding are expected to be signed here before the end of the World Summit.

Cross-fertilization has characterized this joint initiative, with 28 NGOs and ten SMEs forging closer cooperation in the context of “Sharing the Future”. South-South partnership opportunities were explored by participating NGOs, who committed themselves to an ongoing exchange of knowledge and potential expansion of joint activities. Nine NGOs have already formulated the “Global Movement for Promoting the Free and Open Source Software”, which has attracted the support, in principle, of a number of other international development and donor organizations.

As part of the Summit’s parallel ICT4all exhibition, the UNIDO/UNDP initiative has presented the hands-on experience of ICT for industry and sustainable development from the perspective of these two key players in the development challenge.

The Summit’s action plan emphasizes ICT as a means to bridge the poverty gap, a tool to achieve sustainable development and to build an inclusive information society based on effective partnerships. During “Sharing the Future”, these private-sector SMEs have been joined by NGOs from developing countries, and particularly least developed countries, to give a practical perspective on the challenges they face in entering the information highway as well as to seek partnerships in e-business for industry and exchange views on the creative use of ICT.

In the context of applying ICT to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, UNIDO and UNDP organized three workshops and two high level panels, as part of “Sharing the Future”, to pinpoint the particular ICT challenges confronting SMEs and NGOs. These

include the need to progress through three fundamental ICT stages: from computer literacy through informative literacy to knowledge literacy. The dimensions of the ICT-for-development challenge were identified at a variety of levels: individual e-learning; social inclusion in ICT; national e-governance; regional e-networks; industrial e-business and global Internet citizenship.

Participants have also had the opportunity to tap the experience of experts presenting cutting edge ICT products in support of development including demonstration of the \$100 OLPC (One laptop per child) initiative, developed by Massachusetts Institute of Technology to be implemented in partnership with UNDP.

“Sharing the Future” has been supported by the Governments of the Netherlands and Tunisia.

More information is available at: [www.unido.org/wsis](http://www.unido.org/wsis)

**Note for editors**

**The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)** is a specialized agency of the United Nations that focuses its efforts on relieving poverty by fostering productivity growth. It helps developing countries and countries with economies in transition in their fight against marginalization in today's globalized world. UNIDO promotes sustainable industrial development by mobilizing knowledge, skills, information and technology. The Organization has 171 member states. For more information, please visit [www.unido.org](http://www.unido.org).

**The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. UNDP helps developing countries attract and use aid effectively and integrates information and communications technology for development into its work in democratic governance and poverty reduction. UNDP promotes the protection of human rights and the empowerment of women. For more information, please visit [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org).

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