



Canadian International  
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de  
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# Canada's Role in the International Telecommunication Union

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## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to summarize the findings of a study of policy dialogue in the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). This desk study was carried out in late 1998 and early 1999. Data for the study were collected through document review, key-person interview and focus group meetings. Fifty-four persons were contacted for input concerning the study.

Telecommunications is a fundamental underpinning of economic development, and the common infrastructure which carries most information and communication technologies (ICT) services. It is essential to the sustainability of the modern state. In recent years, as the potential of ICTs have become recognized as a transformative tool for development, CIDA has become interested in creating a greater awareness within the telecommunication sector of the role of ICTs in development. The aim has been to generate a greater understanding and shared vision between those who were creating the physical infrastructure and those creating and using the services which flow from that infrastructure. The chosen partner for this effort was the Geneva-based International Telecommunication Union.

The ITU, a specialized agency of the United Nations, has had a long history in the coordination of telecommunication and related information technology infrastructure, including planning, institution building and human resource development within the telecommunication sector (including broadcasting). In recent years, the members of the ITU, national governments and the private sector, have worked together to address the development aspects of telecommunications. Initially this involved the development of the telecommunications sector itself. Then, the ITU focused on the relationship of telecommunications to economic sectors directly concerned with development, such as education, health and agriculture and with the particular problems facing rural and remote areas. This has been followed by a concern with access to the services flowing from the infrastructure, leading to a focus on gender equality, the involvement of NGOs and the need for greater sensitivity to indigenous and local concerns. In this latter phase the ITU has worked in partnership with other agencies (such as UNESCO, IDRC and CIDA) which have mandates in these areas.

CIDA's association with the ITU has both influenced and followed the evolving development trends in the Union. Following more than a decade of direct involvement in physical infrastructure development (such as PANAFTTEL), CIDA continued to work with the ITU on the development of the telecommunication and related information technology sectors, sometimes indirectly or through a third party such as the Telecommunications Executive Management Institute for Canada (TEMIC). With the formation in 1992 of the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector, CIDA began to represent Canada in the new Sector, and Mr. Tony Zeitoun of CIDA assumed responsibility for a number of tasks in the ongoing work of the Union. This has included Vice-Chairmanship of the Telecommunications Development Advisory Board (TDAB) and Vice-chairmanship of the recently-formed ITU Task Force on Gender Issues. CIDA has contributed knowledge or intellectual inputs into numerous conferences, study groups and other fora of the ITU and it is this work that encompasses the *activity* reviewed in this report. This *activity* has resulted in significant achievements between 1992 and 1999.

Beginning in 1992 at the RTDC for the America's Region in Mexico and then at the First World Telecommunication Development Conference in Buenos Aires in 1994, CIDA established an interest in the extension of services to rural and remote areas of the developing world. Through the submission of written contributions to ITU conferences, study groups and meetings, and in close collaboration with the Canadian private sector, CIDA has helped to establish that rural telecommunications can be inherently profitable, and hence could be attractive to private sector investment. This has been done through the sharing of case study examples, models and "best practices" in the ITU. The results of this work have been integrated into manuals, course material and other training and orientation material available to national government and industry members of the Union.

During 1994 it became clear that development and donor agencies, as well as national bodies working in the development sectors (health, education, agriculture etc) were poorly represented in the development activities of the ITU. This prompted CIDA to submit papers to the ITU documenting the benefits to be obtained from telecommunications and related ICTs to the development sectors. This has resulted in a specific activity in the ITU-D Strategic Plan, approved in the 1998 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis, calling for greater participation in the work of the ITU by development agencies and ministries. This work has resulted in a greater awareness within the ITU of the needs and demands of the development sectors for ICT services.

The extension of the interests of the ITU beyond physical infrastructure and into the services flowing from the infrastructure led to the need to address disparities in access to these services. CIDA's response to this need was to submit papers in ITU fora on universal access, particularly gender perspectives, and to support the activities of others in their efforts to involve NGOs and the private sector in the work of the ITU. CIDA has also supported efforts to create a greater awareness of indigenous and local concerns relating to ICTs.

The *activity* produced results in the areas of access, particularly rural communications and services. Results in the area of gender equity show promise but will require further activity from CIDA to ensure sustainability. The manifestation of these results are in the form of a resolution of the ITU that underscores the need for the ITU to incorporate a gender perspective in the implementation of the Union's Strategic and Financial Plans and specific references in the Strategic plan to:

- a) take the initiative to acquaint ministries such as health, education and transport with the role of telecommunications for general economic and social progress, and
- b) invite bilateral development and donor agencies to join the activities of the ITU Development Sector to maximize synergistic efforts toward sustainable universal access to telecommunication services.

The gender initiative has resulted in the creation of a Task Force on Gender Issues, on which Tony Zeitoun of CIDA is the vice-chair.

One of the main results of the Global Knowledge process was the recognition of the importance of establishing strategic partnerships. This led to discussions with the ITU to establish strategic partnerships for the financing of universal access.

Considerable opportunity for practical results are expected to flow from the CIDA/ITU Memorandum of Understanding which will be signed shortly. It will deal with access in rural areas in developing countries and will benefit from CIDA's initiatives in rural communications as well as gender perspectives.

Among the key factors facilitating the *activity's* achievements were the following:

1. Industry Canada has maintained an excellent working relationship with the ITU over many years and pays Canada's membership contribution to the Union (\$6 million in 1998). In addition, Industry Canada has handled the administrative arrangements for Canada's activities connected with the Development Sector including acting as the secretariat for the Canadian National Organization for ITU Development activities. Industry Canada has also co-ordinated representation at ITU development fora when CIDA was unable to staff these activities.
2. The personal commitment, effort and attention to ITU Development issues by Tony Zeitoun of CIDA has been a major contributing factor to the *activity's* success. His choice of issues to bring into the ITU fora, and the staffing and follow-up to ensure their movement through the ITU process, has been a major success factor. In particular he has been instrumental, among others, in shifting the mandate of the ITU-D from the "Development of Telecommunications" to "Telecommunications for Development".
3. A strategic approach to opportunities as they arose in the ITU fora. In particular the choice to pursue gender issues immediately following GK97 was strongly supported by other ITU members and international organizations.
4. CIDA's credibility, as the only bilateral aid agency on the Telecommunications Development Advisory Board, and the major aid agency participating in the work of the Development Sector, building upon a long-standing and positive relationship with the ITU.

In its 1995 foreign policy statement, *Canada in the World*, the Government set out as a fundamental objective its commitment to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development, especially in the poorest countries. This document also set out CIDA's development objectives which, for the purposes of this review, are captured in the IS Review Issues (poverty reduction; enabling environment; capacity building; and equity and access including gender perspectives). Since no objectives were set for the *activity* under review, there are no documented connections between the *activity* and the IS Review Issues, but the views of stakeholders provides a picture.

Efforts have been made over several decades to evaluate the impact of telecommunications and its related services on development and, by extension, on the reduction of poverty. It has been concluded that while no direct link can be made, no country has achieved significant economic growth without a viable telecommunication sector. There is growing evidence that ICT services, such as electronic commerce and other trade related communications carried by the telecommunication system, will play an essential role in the information society and have the potential to alleviate poverty and want.

The *activity*, extending over a seven-year period, offers a number of lessons both for future CIDA activity in the ITU and for the Agency's further work concerning ICTs and development.

1. The *activity* has been instrumental in shifting the focus of the ITU from simply telecommunications infrastructure to the impact that ICTs can have on development more generally. At the same time, many development agencies, such as the FAO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank, have established their own activities to meet their objectives through the use of ICTs. Several of these institutions have a more direct influence on development issues of relevance to CIDA, raising the question of the relative importance of the ITU for the Agency;
2. The *activity* has placed CIDA in the role of a knowledge agency rather than as a traditional donor agency. There has been general acceptance of this new role within the ITU, but most people expect CIDA to follow-up its ideas with financial support. In addition, there is considerable confusion concerning the relationship between CIDA and other Canadian entities such as IDRC.
3. The ITU, like many international organizations, is struggling with the role of new stakeholders in the information society. These include NGOs, new private sector players and societal issues such as gender and indigenous knowledge. These are areas in which CIDA has a strong base of knowledge and experience;
4. The *activity* has generated little interest within CIDA and there is no institutional recognition of the *activity*. Funding is minimal and the work has been left largely to the initiative and commitment of one individual. Several stakeholders would like to see a greater role for CIDA in the ITU, others argue that the existing level of support is adequate and that priorities should be to deal with ICTs for development more directly through agencies with a development mandate.

With respect to the ITU, two major issues need to be addressed:

1. The level at which CIDA should support the *activity* in the future. There is considerable ongoing activity within the CIDA/ITU MOU and the follow-up to gender issues. Closer attention might be paid to other aspects of activity in the ITU and to widening CIDA's involvement in areas outside of the Development Sector such as the Telecommunication Policy Forum;

2. The need to bring the ITU more actively into the wider GKP partnership involving other agencies more closely involved in development.

CIDA's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the ITU will be the major vehicle for continuing co-operation between the two organizations. The MOU was broadly outlined in a *News Release* issued at the 1998 World Telecommunication Development Conference (Malta) as follows:

The partnership MOU is expected to "...cover co-operation by Canada with the ITU in pursuing universal access, executive training and capacity-building, joint pilot projects to encourage rural communications and applications in social, education and health services, regional seminars on best practices and promotion of private sector, government and ITU partnerships. Canadian government participants including CIDA, the International Development Research Centre, and Industry Canada will work with private Canadian companies".

The newly elected Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau of the ITU, Mr. Hamadoun Touré, visited Ottawa on 13 and 14 May, 1999 to explore possible partnership arrangements between Canada and the ITU. It is anticipated that many of the findings, lessons and recommendations in this review will inform future discussions with Mr. Touré as the relationship between CIDA and the ITU develops further.

A weakness in the *activity* has been the lack of clear objectives and goals. The major recommendation of the report is therefore:

<b>Recommendation 1:</b>
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**Policy dialogue initiatives should be well planned prior to the commencement of the exercise. This should include clear objectives for policy dialogue, a clear statement of expected results, a strategy and approach, required tasks, appropriate allocation of resources, and indicators of success. Policy dialogue initiatives are corporate responsibilities, which imply senior management commitment and support, and which should not rely as heavily on individual commitment and initiative.**

A complete list of the balance of the recommendations follows:

<b>Recommendation 2:</b>
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**CIDA should adopt a comprehensive and strategic approach to *policies* for ICTs and development, possibly using the Global Knowledge Partnership as the instrument, including: a new campaign to acquaint people within CIDA and the Canadian development community more generally with the potential benefits of ICTs to development, recognizing that past campaigns have been less than successful;**

- a) **promotion of a greater horizontal sharing and exchange of ideas and experience across CIDA to capture learning and best practice in the use of ICTs for development and its impact on the poor (with emphasis on women);**
- b) **data-gathering, experimentation, pilot projects and field-based research to better understand the impact of ICTs on development;**
- c) **mechanisms to gather and maintain statistical information on infrastructure services using ICTs to provide a basis for future policy development; and**
- d) **assistance to countries to gather statistical information including financial support, “best practice examples” and training.**

<b>Recommendation 3:</b>
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**CIDA’s relationship with the ITU should focus on the following issues or topics:**

- a) **regulatory reform and capacity-building, in collaboration with the ITU and other GK Partners and drawing on Canadian expertise, particularly in the area of spectrum policy and management as a basis for the expansion of wireless-based rural infrastructure services; and**
- b) **policy, regulatory and procedural frameworks. This would include work on specific “models” to address major problem areas in developing countries such as quality of service standards, tariff setting etc.**

<b>Recommendation 4:</b>
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**CIDA should initiate up regular meetings with BDT officials, at least annually, concerning their operational plan to identify those areas where joint partnership and collaboration can assist in the achievement of the goals of both organizations. It is further recommended, where resources are available, that other international organizations, such as WHO, FAO and UNESCO be approached with the aim of exploring collaboration on ICTs for development.**

<b>Recommendation 5:</b>
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**CIDA should consider multi-partner arrangements with the ITU as one of the partners using the GK Partnership or other arrangements to carry out training and seminars about topics such as the WTO Agreement, sector reform, interconnection, standards conformance and electronic commerce.**

<b>Recommendation 6:</b>
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**CIDA should view its capacity-building activities with the ITU as part of a comprehensive long term strategy, building on existing mechanisms. e.g.**

- a) the programmes of TEMIC: a proven tool for capacity building in telecommunications and related information technologies;**
- b) the ITU Centres of Excellence and the possibility of CIDA joining TEMIC, IDRC Canadian industry representatives as participants in these Centres;**
- c) activities under the CIDA/ITU MOU in order to be able to report concrete results at the next WTDC scheduled to be held in 2002.**

<b>Recommendation 7:</b>
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**CIDA should build upon the principles in its new Infrastructure Services policy on the use of ICTs and their cross-cutting developmental impact to establish itself in a leadership position globally in this area.**

<b>Recommendation 8:</b>
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**In order to optimize CIDA's influence with the ITU and other multilateral organizations, CIDA should establish a focal point within the agency for the coordination of efforts concerning ICTs and development.**

<b>Recommendation 9:</b>
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**CIDA should work through existing multilateral channels with organizations such as FAO, WHO, UNESCO, UNDP, UNDHA and UNCTAD to encourage and support the use of ICTs in the developing world and to monitor, through GKP and other sources, the activity of multilateral agencies in this area.**

<b>Recommendation 10:</b>
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**A gender strategy for the ITU should be developed within CIDA and the ITU. This strategy would be based on suggestions in section IV 11 as follows:**

- a) That CIDA encourage ITU staff and members to monitor, and participate if appropriate, in the Global Knowledge list on gender issues moderated by Dr. Janice Brodman of EDC. In this way, TFGI and other interested parties in the ITU could:**
  - draw on GK knowledge;**
  - test ideas, draft legislation, draft policies etc with the list members; and**



- enter into discussion with women interested in ICT and knowledge issues

**This would facilitate a convergence in CIDA's efforts in the GKP and with the ITU as one of its partners.**

- b) That gender be a major part of the projects carried out under the CIDA/ITU MOU, drawing from the knowledge of the GKP.**
- c) That Canada, through the ITU-D, make efforts to propose qualified candidates for ITU positions and thus contribute to raising the number of women in the ITU from the current figure of 16% to the UN target of 35%.**
- d) That CIDA provide advice on training, program and administrative matters to the ITU in their efforts to integrate a gender perspective into their work, particularly in the ITU-D.**
- e) That CIDA, in its work on governance in preparation for GKII, engage the ITU in discussions on gender implications for governance matters concerning the role of ICTs in developing countries.**

<b>Recommendation 11:</b>
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**Efforts be made to capture and document Canadian examples of policies relevant to ICTs which may have application to the developing world, and in particular those based upon the research of IDRC. Studies could be undertaken in partnership with infoDev on topics such as the linkages between access and information and ICT services and poverty reduction.**