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## **One Challenge, One Spirit:**

**The Stockholm Challenge Award  
and  
Rome's Global Junior Challenge**

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## Abstract

*The emergence of a new society always offer new opportunities and choices to do better than in the past. It also brings new uncertainties and risks particularly for those regions, countries and communities facing significant proportions of poverty and exclusion. Today a common sentiment exist among many people that information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help improve the wellbeing of ALL and that something can be done about it. This paper discusses two related types of experience, both contributing positively to this challenging endeavour. The first is the Stockholm Challenge Award (SCA) and Rome's Global Junior Challenge (GJC) (the Challenges), two global contests of information society experiences, and the second is project SITA aimed at bringing hope to poverty-excluded women from Delhi (India). Project SITA is a winner in Rome's Global Junior Challenge. The paper concludes with a discussion on the opportunity and nature of a global social movement on the digital divide.*


*The Global Junior Challenge 2000 was promoted by the Municipality of Rome with the support of Unisys, I&T, Acea, IBM, Oracle, Ois, Finsiel;*



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# One Challenge, One Spirit: The Stockholm Challenge Award and Rome's Global Junior Challenge <sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

At the dawn of the information society the world faces momentous challenges to improve the quality of life and work of all peoples without distinction of any kind. The emergence of a new society always offer new opportunities and choices to do better than in the past. It also brings new uncertainties and risks particularly for those regions, countries and communities facing significant proportions of poverty and exclusion. The risk is that these countries and communities may be left even further behind and potentially excluded from the benefits of the information society if no positive action is taken to tackle the divide ('digital divide') at the early stages. Fortunately, the realisation of this risk is prompting the emergence of many initiatives and activities at multiple societal levels to tackle the challenge of the digital divide. The common sentiment is that information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help improve the wellbeing of all peoples and that something can be done to make true the dream of an information society for all.

The objective of this paper is to discuss two related types of experience, both contributing positively to the growing social movement on the digital divide. The first is the Stockholm Challenge Award (SCA) and Rome's Global Junior Challenge (GJC) (*the Challenges*), and the second is project SITA aimed at bringing hope to poverty-excluded women from Delhi (India). Project SITA is a winner in Rome's Global Junior Challenge. The paper concludes with a discussion on the opportunity and nature of a global social movement on the digital divide.

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<sup>1</sup> A longer version of this paper was presented at the Third Global Forum in Naples. See Molina (2001).



## 2. SCA and Rome Challenges<sup>2</sup>

The origins of the Challenge go back to 1995 when Sweden joined the European Union and in a clever stroke of 'enlightened self-interest,' the City of Stockholm decided that they wanted to be at the centre of Europe in spite of their more peripheral geographical position. The way to do it was by challenging all large European cities to demonstrate whether they were "doing better than Stockholm" in each one of the 10 areas identified as strategic for information society development in Europe by the then famous policy report, The Bangemann Report.<sup>3</sup> This report had been issued in 1994 by a high-level Commission chaired by European Commissioner Martin Bangemann.<sup>4</sup>

So the Stockholm Bangemann Challenge was born and became a major success with the participation of over 120 projects submitted by approximately 25 large European cities. Fourteen winners were honoured at the time with the Globe Award (Figure 1: Stockholm Challenge Award Given to Winners) made of recycled TV tubes that has become the symbol of the Stockholm Challenge. The experience certainly fulfilled all expectations, not only positioning Stockholm at the centre of Europe, but also laying the foundations for an even more ambitious next event: the Global Bangemann Challenge.



**Figure 1**


Launched in 1997 during the final ceremony of the first European Challenge, the Global Bangemann Challenge took the contest to the entire world, attracting over 700 projects from all continents, a massive quantitative increase whose evaluation became a small

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<sup>2</sup> Based on speech "The Spirit of the Challenge" given by A. Molina at the Stockholm Challenge Award Conference on 5 June 2000, Stockholm.

<sup>3</sup> The categories were: Teleworking, Distance Learning, Network for Universities and Research Centres, Telematics Services for SMEs, Road Traffic Management, Air Traffic Control, Healthcare Networks, Electronic Tendering, Trans-European Public Administrations Networks, City Information Highways.


<sup>4</sup> Commission of European Communities (1994).



challenge in itself. The Global Bangemann Challenge's final ceremony took place in June 1999, honouring 18 winners from 11 categories and paving the way for the year 2000's Stockholm Challenge Award (SCA), and for the recent 2001 Award with over 740 projects, 100 finalists and 14 winners from 7 categories. The final ceremony of the SCA is celebrated in the splendid Blue Hall of the City of Stockholm and the prizes of the last two Challenges have been handed over by the Mayor of Stockholm, Carl Cederschiold. Table 2 shows the 2001 winners in the different categories and the motivations can be found in the SCA website ([www.challenge.stockholm.se](http://www.challenge.stockholm.se))<sup>5</sup>

Table 1. Categories and Winners in the Stockholm Challenge Award 2001	
Categories	Winners
Public Services & Democracy	Hong Kong - Electronic Service Delivery, Hong Kong, China Moure's per Barcelona - Moving in Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
Culture & Entertainment	Museums & Millennium, Quebec, Canada Historic City Center: Old Montreal Website, Montréal, Canada
Health & Quality of Life	SUMA - The Humanitarian Supply Management Project- USATeenex, Slough, United Kingdom
Education	Virtual High School, Concord, United States Highest Possible Impact - Creating The First High School Internet Learning Centers In Laos, Vientian, Laos Computers In Homes , Wellington, New Zealand
New Economy	Tortasperu, Lima, Peru
Environment	Earth's 911, Berkeley, California Lab's Alive , Ararat, Australia
A Global Village	Information Village Research Project, Chennai, India TARAhaat, New Delhi, India

<sup>5</sup> Information of the 1999 winners, the 2000 winners and finalists, and the 2001 winners and finalists 2001 is also found in the SCA website.



Looking back it is clear that “enlightened self-interest” was an important driving force in the rise and development of the Challenge. Most importantly, this “enlightened self-interest” developed into a profound vision and spirit of contribution to the dream of “an information society for the benefit of all.” At the dawn of the era of the information society, it stressed that humanity is engaged in a massive long-term learning process, much of it trial and error, that is simultaneously carving the shape of the global information society. It understood that, in this process, free market and competition are certainly central dynamic forces, but that there are major issues concerning globalization and, particularly, the complex goal of “social inclusion” - of the elimination of the divide between the “have” and “the have-not” - that require dialogue and collaborative approaches by all those working for an “information society for all.”

By celebrating and rewarding the efforts of pioneering individuals and organisations working for an information society for all, the Stockholm Challenge has helped to energise these efforts as well as catalysing interactions, sharing and emulation of ideas. Not surprisingly, from the very first event the organisers have postulated that in the spirit of the Challenge “everybody is a winner” and not only the Award winning projects, or even the City of Stockholm through their success in creating the prime world event for pioneering information society projects. The aim is about learning and working together for a better future, it is about inspiring others to think of the possibility of contributing their own Challenges in close relationship with Stockholm.

The City of Rome was one of those who took this inspiration and transformed it into reality. Rome identified education as critical for the development of an information society for all and launched the Global Junior Challenge (GJC) in 1999, in the context of its presidency of the European Telecities Network<sup>6</sup> - with Stockholm holding the vice-presidency. The GJC was launched as an international competition for the most innovative educational projects developed by students, educators, young adults entering the job market and others.





Rome argued that education is at the heart of the process of building an information society for all and that the improvement its own educational structures and processes through the use of ICTs requires inspiration, sharing and learning from one another. The premise is the same as that of the SCA but focused on education, that is, Rome and societies around the world are embarking in long-term learning processes concerning the use of ICTs in education and the Global Junior Challenge is Rome's enlightened self-interested way to contribute to this process.

The first GJC took place in 2000 and the final ceremony happened on 4 December 2000 in Rome's famous Campidoglio City Hall honouring 14 winners from 5 categories (see Table 2) and 90 finalists from 588 projects and from over 50 countries from all continents of the world.<sup>7</sup> The prizes most appropriately represented by the symbol of the foundation of Rome –La Lupa and Romulo y Remo– (Figure 2) were handed over by the then Mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli and the success of the experience paved the way for the launch of a bolder instrument to advance the vision of a new educational renaissance for Rome-Lazio and potentially other places.



**Figure 2**

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<sup>6</sup> The Telecities network is an association of European cities working for the information society. See <http://www.telecities.org>. The Global Junior Challenge was also part of the Global Cities Dialogue (GCD), an initiative of Mayors of the World for a Global Cities Dialogue on the Information Society. The spirit of the challenge is enshrined in the Declaration of the GCD signed in Helsinki (the Declaration of Helsinki at <http://www.globalcitiesdialogue.org/declaration.htm>) and both Stockholm and Rome are members of the GCD's Strategic Steering Group, with Stockholm as vice-president to the presidency of Issy-les-Molineaux. For the GCD visit <http://www.globalcitiesdialogue.org/> For the original strategy of the Global Cities Dialogue, see Molina (1999).

<sup>7</sup> For further information about the motivations and the projects, see <http://www.gjc.it>



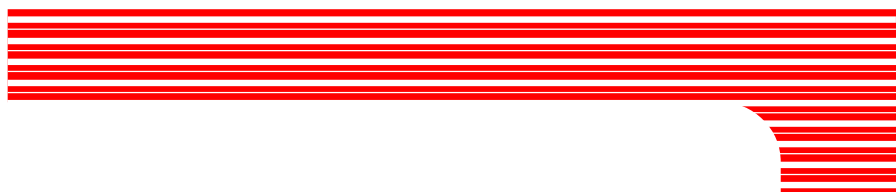
**Table 2. Categories and Winners in the Global Junior Challenge 2000**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Winners</b>
Up to 10 year old	Babynet (Spain)
Up to 15 years old	3D Sound Learning Environments for Blind Learners (Chile)
Up to 18 years old	Kidlink (Norway)Yomag.net - European online magazine for young consumers (Germany) J unior Journal (International)
Up to 29 years old	I*earn (the international education and resource network) (Morocco)The WebQuest Page (USA)Lern forum Deutsch (Germany)
'Work'	SITA (Studies in Information Technology Applications: Computer Skill Training for low-income women) (India)
Special Mention	SITA (Studies in Information Technology Applications: Computer Skill Training for low-income women) (India)
President of the Italian Republic Awards	Frenzy of the End of the Millennium (Caserta, Italy)The adventures of Piera...the tin which was not inclined to end up in a rubbish bin (Spoleto, Italy)

This is the Digital Youth Consortium constituted as a public-private partnership among the Municipality of Rome and six major ICT suppliers<sup>8</sup> aimed at the dissemination of ICT technologies for education among the young in Rome/Lazio. The Digital Youth Consortium has as one of its key activities the continuation of the GJC.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The members of the consortium are the Municipality of Rome, Acea, Elea, Engineering, eWorks, Infostrada and Unisys,

<sup>9</sup> The DYC is broadly conceived as an alliance of schools and training places, government organizations, ICT suppliers and service providers, and all stakeholders having an interest in, and subscribing to, the goal of a "new educational renaissance" for the benefit of new generations and the sustainable development of the information society in the Rome-Lazio region. See [www.digitalyouth.net](http://www.digitalyouth.net)



In essence, the Stockholm Challenge Award and Rome's Global Junior Challenge are "one challenge, one spirit" and together they offer a platform for highlighting best-practices, rewarding innovation and stimulating the sharing of experiences among all those concerned with an information society for the benefit of all. The Challenges have an in-built assessment of best-practice mechanism in the presence of its international jury. And, as revealed by a survey on the value of the Stockholm and Rome's Challenges,<sup>10</sup> the ceremony and other associated activities such as the finalist exhibition, project shows, and web exposure provide an environment that helps pioneering projects, experiences and individuals to become visible, network, and learn from each other.

In the Challenges, it seems clear that the cities of Stockholm and Rome have given the world an opportunity and a practical framework to nurture a globally-shared learning environment of information-society projects. The emphasis on digital divide has added to the inspirational value of the occasions, truly giving to the pioneering social entrepreneurs of the information society a reason to dream of the possibility of international recognition. In this sense, the cities of Stockholm and Rome have created the possibility of short but highly energising moments that should help in the less glamorous, often frustrating days, of most of the year. We shall see that this has been the case of project SITA discussed below.

### **3. A Tale of the Pioneering Project SITA<sup>11</sup> -**

The central question addressed by Project SITA (Studies in Information Technology Applications: Training in Computer Skills for Low-income Women) is how to bring the physically and/or socially disabled sector into the mainstream applications of emerging information and communications technologies. SITA's answer has been to create facilities, resources and content to train women from low-income families in computing skills as a step into finding employment and, ultimately, improving the wellbeing of their families. The choice of women as the focus of the initiative lies in the belief

<sup>10</sup> See Molina (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Based on K. Sane (2000) and text found in <http://www.gjc.comune.roma.it/uk/show.asp>



that "If you teach women, you're changing the future, because women are the natural teachers of the coming generations."<sup>12</sup>

The idea evolved from a long-standing concern of its leader, Krishna Sane, who as a Professor at the University of Delhi, directed the UNESCO sponsored project *Locally Produced Low Cost Equipment Project* (LPLCE) during 1980-1995. At the same time, Dr. Kamalini Sane, his (late) wife and professional colleague found that it was possible to train needy women in the area of Desktop Publishing (DTP) using the manuscripts they had written for the LPLCE Project. Appropriately people who were trained in the first group joined the enterprise helping to take it further as funds became available through a grant provided by InfoDEV - the support/funding programme from the World Bank.


Project SITA for women empowerment began operation in mid-1999 aiming to achieve the following targets:

- Training a core group of trainers
- Developing a resource package (print and audio-visual material with multimedia modules)
- Training 500 disadvantaged women for employment by December 2000

To achieve these targets, SITA selected small batches of trainees and gave them, free of charge, intensive hands-on computer training based on real life exercises using MS Office 2000. For these purposes, SITA's core team has also developed an extensive resource package consisting of modern office computer skills, a multi-lingual training manual, audio-visual and interactive multimedia modules for self learning and other developmental support materials, including an English-Hindi-Urdu dictionary for minimal comprehension of English.

Wherever possible trainees were attached to a potential employer and, at the end of the two-month course, each trainee was required to offer part-time services as an assistant to a Trainer. During its operation from July 1999 to December 2001, Project SITA has trained 507 needy women of whom more than 80% are below

<sup>12</sup> Phrase from Krishna Sane.



the age of 30 and have limited reading, writing and communication skills coupled with low-confidence levels. This did not prove a deterring factor for most of the trainees to achieve commendable proficiency in basic computer skills. Successful trainees were given a Certificate and assistance in trying to get employment.<sup>13</sup> One of the success stories of SITA is Kiran Arora who has set up a training facility in her home in a low-income neighbourhood in East Delhi.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 3**

Figure 3 shows Kiran in her low-income living environment and Figure 4 shows the training facilities she has set up at home.




**Figure 4**

SITA has given hope to the needy women of Delhi. Securing jobs, however, has proven a more difficult challenge and the majority of women trained by SITA failed to find jobs in the market, leading to a significant drop out

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<sup>13</sup> For these achievements, SITA has received international appreciation as finalist in the Stockholm Challenge Award 2000 competition in June, 2000; finalist in the ICT story competition organised by IICD, October, 2000; and winner of the Global Junior Challenge Award, Rome, December 2000

<sup>14</sup> The formatting of this article was done by Kiran to whom the draft was sent electronically, as part of an effort to encourage organizations in developed countries to commission work and provide jobs for people from low-income communities such as those where Kiran lives.



rate. Later on, it emerged that an intermediate step is necessary, with the trained women getting exposure to a work place and office environment, through short-term internships with NGOs or international organizations, for instance. This enables them to prove the quality of their work, to improve their confidence and social skills as well as earning them some much needed income. The credit for this idea goes to the UN Asia and Pacific Centre for Technology Transfer (UN APCTT) in New Delhi, who have also been the first to lead its implementation to very good results. How well SITA trainees have learnt their skills and performed is shown by the remarks of the Director of UN APCTT, Dr. J. Bischoff, sent to Prof. Sane.

We have received today the typed text for the Technology Transfer Training Manual. We are overwhelmed by the quality of the work both from the point of view of accuracy and layout and also timely delivery. Congratulations on your well trained and able staff. Thank you for arranging this work for us. Based on this excellent experience, we will surely continue to work with you.<sup>15</sup>

It seems apparent that if, as Prof Sane believes, "this win-win situation is properly publicized and replicated, SITA-type Projects should become sustainable fairly easily."<sup>16</sup>


For the longer-term, SITA is trying to evolve the project's business model into a cooperative model –Mitra Mandal- that could achieve sustainability and this is where the enterprise is battling today, with deep awareness that the underlying socio-economic factors are complex and not easy to overcome.

The SITA experience clearly confirms that the path trailed by humanitarian projects devoted to improve the lot of the poor is seldom an easy one because the difficulties for sustainability tend to be higher than normal business projects. Yet if the digital-divide

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<sup>15</sup> Personal communication from Dr. J. Bischoff to Prof. Krishna Sane, dated 3 October 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication from Prof. Sane to the author, 10 February 2002.



is to be tackled this type of projects must also find a salient place in the agenda of change. This is where sharing, solidarity and the energising impact of initiatives such as the Challenges plays a fundamental role. Indeed, when SITA won the GJC award, it could not have come at a more critical time. SITA's leader, Prof. Krishna Sane, had reached the end of its energy and was about to give up on the project. The award handed over by the Mayor of Rome (see Figure 5) and the contacts, dialogue and new ideas emerged during the days of the event changed all that. As K. Sane has told the author: "I could not have carried on in 2001. I had gone to Rome completely deflated but returned with my batteries recharged!!!. GJC should quote this example in favour of their Award."<sup>17</sup> This re-energising has now led to a new award given by Digital Partners<sup>18</sup> who will support the business development of the new cooperative model with both funding and sustained business advise by experienced business individuals.

**Figure 5. Krishna Sane (middle), Leader of SITA Project Receives Award from Mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli in the presence of Indian Ambassador in Italy**



**Figure 5**

<sup>17</sup> ICL for instance has defined that "as a leading IT services company, we aim to make a significant contribution to 'social inclusion' in today's Information Society." (<http://www.icl.com/about/community/index.htm>). So is the case with many other major corporations. See for instance <http://www.digitaldivide.org/corps.html> for social responsibility declarations and policies from over 50 corporations.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.techempower.net/>



#### 4. Conclusions – Towards a Global ‘Digital Divide’ Social Movement

The Stockholm Challenge Award, Rome’s Global Junior Challenge and projects such as SITA are examples of the many experiences and initiatives that, today, are working for an information society for all. The Challenges represent a contribution of two major cities, and project SITA is a grassroot effort supported by international organisations (in this case InfoDev from the World Bank). Other experiences can be found at every societal level and arena of activity, from the highest international levels of United Nations and the G8 to community and even individual’s projects, in multiple areas such as health, education, democracy, community development, poverty etc. There is plenty of evidence in the work of organisations such as the *G8 dot.force*, the UN ICT Task Force, the UN Volunteers, the World’s Bank Global Development Gateway and InfoDev, and the adoption of digital-divide policies by governments and the non-profit sector. Also highly important is the adoption of ‘social inclusion’ policies by the private sector,<sup>19</sup> as well as the emergence of catalyzer organisations such as Bridges, Digital Partners, Technology Empowerment Network,<sup>20</sup> Digital Nations and, as we have seen, the Stockholm and Rome Challenges. But above all there are the many civil-society, community and individual experiences pioneering on the ground the path for an information society for all.<sup>21</sup>

This diversity and richness makes possible to think of the emergence of a more ‘self-conscious’ *global digital-divide social movement* in which initiatives may have the opportunity to interact, share lessons, resources and, generally, learn together in the construction of an information society for all. In this view, a digital-divide social movement is not a centralised organisation, it is a boundless, free


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<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.techempower.net/>

<sup>20</sup> See Okinawa Charter on the Information Society (G8 2000)

<sup>21</sup> Ludomatica is a project about playful, creative and collaborative interactive learning environments for children aged 7 to 12. See <http://lidie.uniandes.edu.co/ludomatica>





flowing association of people sharing and pursuing in myriad ways the realisation of a dream. It is a space for leadership, creativity, innovation, emulation, cooperation, competition, fulfilment and disappointments in pursuit of change. It may be partly coordinated or simply loosely associated through mechanisms for sharing and learning about different experiences. The bond –whatever the manifestation- is simply the shared dream and the desire to do something about it.

Most importantly, in this movement the sum total of the actions of individual initiatives would be greater than the value of each individual initiative ( $1 + 1 = 3$ ). The reason is that by coming together new spaces for synergies emerge, which enable the possibility of enhancing and enlarging flows of information, knowledge, experiences and resources for all those involved in the movement in one way or another. The Stockholm and Rome Challenges exemplify well the gains of working together to catalyse flows of knowledge, experience, interactions, energies and resources. As witnessed by Alvaro Galvis, leader of project Ludomatica,<sup>22</sup> winner of the Education Category of the Stockholm Challenge 1999,


“...becoming a finalist meant the possibility of sharing ideas at a global level with other groups, as well as participating as an exhibitor in a very exciting fair. We were able to realize that local initiatives become increasingly global when others know what you are doing and when you have the opportunity to share it. But winning the contest in the Innovations in Education category was a hit. In Colombia the educational sector does not bring many good international news to the social arena. But when Ludomatica was awarded in The Global Bangemann Challenge 1999, it was the case. Many unbelievers of the importance of the project had to recognize its unique nature. Groups that were investing in the pilot phase decided to help in its expansion. National and international funds were obtained based on this international recognition.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ludomatica is a project about playful, creative and collaborative interactive learning environments for children aged 7 to 12. See <http://lidie.uniandes.edu.co/ludomatica>

<sup>23</sup> For full text see <http://www.challenge.stockholm.se>

**Table 3. Variety of Initiatives, Actions by Source-Reach (Geography), Donor-Implementor, Purpose and Final Aim**

<b>Geographical Source and Reach</b>	Global	Multi-Lateral	Int. Region	National	Nat. Region	Cities/Rural Areas, Towns & Villages	Civil Society / Communities / Individual	Hybrids
Global	Organizational Donor and	Private	Public	Non-profit (e.g., NGO, Foundation)	Non-profit (e.g., NGO, Foundation)	Civil Society / Communities / Individual	Hybrids	
Multi-lateral		<b>Purpose</b>	Governance	Project Funding Support	Grass root Support	Hybrids	Others	
Int. Regional	Private	Public	Governance	Project Funding Support	Grass root Support	Hybrids	Others	
National	Public	Governance	Project Funding Support	Grass root Support	Hybrids	Others		
Nat. Regional	Non-Profit (e.g., NGO Foundation)	Project Funding Support	Grass root Support	Hybrids	Others			
Cities/Rural Areas, Town & Villages	Civil Society / Communities / Individual	Hybrids	Others	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Business</b> <b>Service</b> <b>Humanitarian</b></p> </div>				
Civil Society / Communities / Individuals	Hybrids	Others	Others					



This is precisely the point of a global social movement – to help catalyse and enable many more positive experiences such as described by Alvaro Galvis. And here, as illustrated by Table 3, the possibilities for action and creativity are simply enormous. Indeed, Table 3 provides an idea of the enormous variety of possible digital-divide initiatives and actions by geographical source and reach, by donor or implementor, by purpose and by final aim. The table is constructed in four layers, with multiple columns and rows to stress the huge combinatorial possibilities of initiatives and actions. The *first* broad layer (green column-row) shows the geographical possibilities at many levels, illustrating the point that there might be multiple forms of interactions (eg., bilateral, multi-lateral). The *second* broad layer (light blue column-row) shows that inside the geographical possibilities, there are many organisational possibilities both as donors and/or implementors, including the private sector, public sector, non-profit sector, civil society/communities, individuals and the many hybrids forms combining them.

The *third* broad layer (light red column-row) illustrates that inside the other combinatorial potential of the previous two layers, there are various possibilities for the broad purpose pursued by the different initiatives and actions. This includes governance purpose with all those initiatives aiming at changing or creating legal frameworks and more broadly changes in cultural practices and attitudes in government, business and other stakeholders such as those referred to by Prahalad (2000). It also includes funding/support purpose for other initiatives, grassroot projects and all the hybrid possibilities. The final box inside all the other layers (deeper blue) shows the various possibilities for final aim, including business or profits, public services such as improvements in education, humanitarian such as non-profit projects aimed at improving the livelihood and/or working conditions of fellow human beings, and all the possible hybrids forms.

Although no systematic survey exist, it is not unreasonable to think that initiatives and actions already occur at most, if not all, layers in Table 3. Furthermore, if the challenge of the digital divide is to be effectively tackled at global level, initiatives and actions at all these layers are most likely to be required. Some will have larger impact




than others, some will perhaps be in competition with others but, ultimately, they should all be focused on the challenge of reducing poverty and exclusion through the exploitation of the digital opportunity. This is what would make it a global social movement.

In this movement the frontline of change is occupied by the myriad projects and experiences that are in direct contact with the poor and excluded in countries, regions, cities, rural areas and communities. True, sometimes the initiatives of international organisations (e.g., G8's dot.force, UN's ICT Task Force, OECD, ITU and others) attract most of the limelight, but in reality they are only one player in the total ensemble required to effect a real change. Ultimately, it is at the grassroot level that the realisation of the dream of an inclusive digital economy is being made to happen by the pioneers and innovators of the information society. This means that to a large extent the entire ensemble of governance, policy and support/funding thinking and action at all geographical levels will be tested in their effectiveness in the degree to which they help create the fertile terrain and environment for these "digital-divide" projects to flourish. Conversely, grassroot digital-divide projects will also be tested in their effectiveness in the degree to which they are able to effect change in the living and working conditions of the poor and excluded and, implicitly, in the degree to which they are able to generate the resources necessary to exist.

One problem and opportunity at this early stage of development of the global information society is that its *governance is still in process of formation and the issue of the digital-divide, although largely absent from the spontaneous workings of its predominant profit-driven market mechanism, may yet find a salient place in the consciousness, attitudes and actions of all players* – public, private and non-profit sectors, civil society/communities and individuals. This is essential if an information society for all is to have a chance to become a reality.

Progress in this direction demands the pursuit of at least the following interrelated actions.



(1) Continue to stimulate and support initiatives and actions (public, private, non-profit, etc.) emerging and taking place at the moment as well as their networking to exploit synergies. Brokering of grassroots projects with support/funding organisations is particularly important, including reviews and support for sustainable business development purposes. An annotated 'mapping' of such initiatives and actions would be useful, probably building from the databases of current initiatives. Equally important is the reporting of experiences for learning and inspirational purposes. This has not got to be only about successes because 'failures' are a natural part of learning especially at early stages very much dominated by trial and error.

(2) Stimulate massive awareness on the issues of the digital divide and its deep relation to the challenge of poverty and exclusion reduction raised by the UN Millennium Summit: reduction of poverty by half by 2015. This should be high on the agenda of every player and every opportunity should be taken to persuade others to join the challenge. Participation need not entail radically new activities or change for individuals and organisations. There will be this too, but most participation can actually happen through minor incremental changes in scope.

Just ask yourself:

- is there a possible way in which what I do can be of benefit to the digitally excluded?
- what incremental change would I need to implement to be able to benefit the digitally excluded with what I already do?

True, an incremental contribution by one individual or organisation in isolation may look like "a drop in the ocean." However, if millions do the same such drops have the potential to become an "ocean of change." The task is therefore to "transform drops of concern into an ocean of change," and here the networking capabilities of the technology itself can play a critical role in enabling the emergence of a shared spirit on a global scale – the digital-divide social movement.



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*Formatted by the trainees from Project SITA ([www.sitaa.org](http://www.sitaa.org))  
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