



BROADBAND, INNOVATION AND COMPETITIVENESS IN THE AMERICAS

Strategic Dialogue of the Inter-American Commission on Telecommunications (CITEL) Opening Keynote by

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First, let me thank you for the opportunity to participate in this strategic dialogue on Broadband, Innovation and Competitiveness, a topic that every day becomes more integral to the development agenda of the Americas. Many of you would be aware that the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development, the area that I lead at the Organization of American States (OAS), is responsible for working with our member states to help achieve sustainable and inclusive economic, social and human development.

What does that mean concretely? The Secretariat responds to country needs by supporting policy dialogue, providing technical assistance and facilitating development cooperation in areas such as education and employment, competitiveness and innovation, natural resource management, and science and technology, among others.

Essentially, the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development is the OAS's action arm for development. Policy dialogue among member states determines focus and drives the Organization's decision-making. We provide the technical capacity and expertise to help deliver on policy commitments, convert policy decisions into concrete action, and follow through to ensure results.

To do this, we work with strategic partners both inside and outside of the Organization. CITEL, which was created to promote sustainable development of telecommunications/ICT in the Hemisphere, has likewise had that approach since its inception. We see that reflected in today's dialogue with the participation of government officials, private sector representatives, development agencies, multilateral organizations and civil society – a truly multi-sectorial engagement to address a cross-cutting issue.

In 1948, when the OAS was created, broadband, innovation and competitiveness, as one would expect, were not a part of the discussion. However, even back then, the framers of the OAS Charter, meeting in Bogota, Colombia, envisioned a hemisphere in which integral development, encompassing the economic, social, educational, cultural, scientific, and technological fields would be the foundation for achieving peace and security.



Fast forward to 2012. Heads of State and Government meeting at the VI Summit of the Americas in Cartagena, Colombia, emphasized the role of ICTs as a driver for innovation, competitiveness and inclusion, and called on public-private partnerships to support initiatives that ensure “equitable and affordable access to, and use of, expanded broadband, information and communication technologies (ICTs)” including in remote and rural areas. They also pledged “to promote and support, as appropriate, initiatives that expand the contribution of ICTs to innovation, entrepreneurship, productivity, competitiveness, the emergence of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, and economic growth, within the framework of sustainable development.”

At the highest policy levels, there is public recognition that access to high-speed broadband supports job creation, boosts economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development and can serve as a tool for empowerment. Access to high-speed broadband is also key for realizing the full potential of converged services and applications; to deliver content and essential services in health, education, agriculture, and other essential areas. The same is true in practically every area we can think of -- whether facilitating effective emergency responses e.g. in cases of natural disasters; creating business opportunities; or facilitating effective public management.

A UNDP report in 2012 observed that ICTs will “neither pull people out of poverty, nor propel democratic governance. Instead they are catalytic tools for enhancing and broadening development programming if deployed strategically.”

For a region that’s confronted with the challenge of inequality, access and inclusion must be an integral part of the development matrix for new and emerging technologies. ICTs are providing us with a tool that can help in efforts to reduce poverty, and address what has long been one of the most intractable challenges facing the Americas – the problem of inequality.

Capacity building is also important. I have long been a strong proponent of quality education as a change driver. I have seen how the ability to deliver education to youth and adults in rural and underserved communities through the use of innovative technologies, can change individual lives and impact communities in ways that are both immediate as well as long term.

And so, our programs seek to build institutional and human capacity, laying the groundwork for stakeholder buy-in and sustainability. One such example would be the Inter-American Teachers Education Network (ITEN) which, in under a year, garnered over 18,000 active members and grew from being a hemispheric community to a global community of practice to share good practices among members of the teaching profession from primary through tertiary level. Access has provided a tool to enhance and expand the outreach of development actions.

While the proliferation and rapid emergence of new technologies are leading to convergence between sectors, we also recognize that this necessitates new approaches to regulation and standardization, and an ongoing evaluation of legal frameworks to create an enabling



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environment that supports more investment in infrastructure, the creation of new services, and the development of new business models.

With the array of expertise present, today's strategic dialogue is well positioned to provide ideas that can help shape competitiveness and innovation in our region. We have an extraordinary opportunity to bring the enormous social and economic benefits of ICTs to all the Americas.

CITEL, as the OAS high-level specialized advisory organization for ICTs, knows the importance of helping to build a common vision. So I look forward to this strategic dialogue and the ideas that will emerge to further drive competitiveness, power innovation and optimize the universe of opportunities that are being made possible through ICTs. And I hope that coming out of this dialogue, we will see a strengthening of public-partnership partnerships to advance development strategies that are sustainable, inclusive and transformational.

Thank you.