

Remarks at the
ICTs for Poverty Reduction Workshop
Harvard University, Boston
September 19-20, 2003
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Welcome! It is a pleasure to have such wide and deep experience represented here, across technology, economic, social, gender and other dimensions of ICT and poverty issues. I would particularly like to thank our convenors, Michael Spence and Amartya Sen, and our hosts Dwight Perkins and Lincoln Chen.

(depending on how the meeting room feels when we're all there) I would like to make one apology for the size of our meeting room today. The room tomorrow is more spacious, and we had the option of a larger room today, but the alternative was much less pleasant in terms of environment, and we agreed with our friends and hosts here in Cambridge to stay with this room and be a little 'cozy.' We'll take breaks when we need them, and approach the agenda in a relaxed manner.

I am also grateful to so many very busy people for taking the time to pursue timely and important objectives. As you know, IDRC has been supporting ICT4D since its creation in the early 1970s. Knowledge and its sources have always been crucial to development research, and development. The technologies have become immensely more powerful in the past 30 years. And with so much current global emphasis on poverty reduction, I believe there remain important areas of disconnect between ICT and poverty reduction strategies.

Most have sent ideas in advance, and most will have read through these. Michael Spence and Muhammad Yunus will give you back their sense of these contributions, and we will want to discuss the issues they raise. But rather than reiterating views, I encourage us to enter into a conversation aimed at clarifying (meeting objectives):

- the connections between diffusion of ICTs, and poverty, in developing countries of different kinds;
- ways in which ICT policies, management and investments can be more effective for poverty reduction;
- priority areas for action and research, for increasing the contribution of ICTs to poverty reduction.

I would like very much to arrive tomorrow afternoon at a sense that we could convey to the WSIS and other for a of practical means and priorities for increasing the contribution of ICTs to poverty reduction. Depending on our views and conclusions, IDRC and I are prepared to advocate initiatives to countries and donors. But this means, I think, keeping our focus as much as appropriate and possible on poverty and on ICTs. We will need to address broader issues in growth, development and equity - but I ask that ICTs and poverty reduction be the constant concerns.

As I mentioned in my invitation to you, IDRC is also prepared to follow up on conclusions we may reach, in the form of development research support, both with our own resources and in partnership with others, and if this takes form it will need some ongoing guidance.

Please don't worry about the recording team; they are professionals, and will I think be quite unobtrusive. Our plan is to produce short compilations of interesting and important messages, for the WSIS, governments, other international fora, donors, etc. I hope you will trust us to put together these compilations in the spirit of our discussions and viewpoints.

[Maureen – perhaps an observation or two about what struck you most so far? – eg distinction between commercial and 'social' ICT sectors and their development, large challenges of integrating technological and social development requisites and the perspectives of their proponents, prominence of gender in ICT-poverty experience and thinking...]

The program has several individuals suggested to lead off in each section; this is our best guess at your interests, but you should feel free to contribute as you see fit in the discussions.

.. I wish us a very fruitful workshop..