



The information revolution has not only changed the world as we know it, but also its future potential. Information and Communication Technologies, with their major technological leaps, have affected the lives and lifestyles of people across the globe, as well as the way institutions and organisations do business. In their wake, jobs have been created, businesses expanded, and life for many people has improved. However, not all outcomes of the spread of information technologies have been positive. A majority of the world's population, especially those who live in poverty, have been largely bypassed by this revolution. Least developed nations, and rural societies, in particular, are in danger of falling further behind in this information age. The gap between them and the rest of the world has expanded precisely as a result of the facilitating capacity of these technologies for those who have access to them.

Nowhere is this digital divide more pronounced than in countries of the African continent. Africa is the most unconnected, in an increasingly connected world. Yet, given the broad spectrum of development

challenges, including fighting diseases, famine and poverty while striving for socio-economic, technological and industrial development and the promotion of its vast material and intellectual resource and cultural heritage for global competitiveness, ICTs offer a remarkable opportunity and set of tools for achieving substantive progress.

It is in recognition of this unique opportunity to support Africa's drive for self-development that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency, Mr. Kofi Annan, in creating the United Nations ICT Task Force, called on its members and the global ICT community at large, to mobilise all available resources through a holistic public/private partnership to deploy the full range of ICT capacities in pursuit of the UN Millennium Development Goals.

From its inauguration, the Task Force, assisted by the United Nations system, has joined forces with leading African experts in the ICT field, African political leaders and their global counterparts, regional and international development institutions, and, most especially, the public, private and academic sectors, and civil society, in Africa and abroad, in a concerted effort to respond to the Secretary-General's clarion call. In doing so, the Task Force has taken its cue from the priorities and targets Africans have themselves established for their countries in this enormous undertaking.

A major part of this effort has involved taking stock of what is, what needs to be, and the strategies and scenarios for making it happen. This has engendered an exciting and highly productive and positive debate and dialogue aimed at ensuring maximum benefit from every bit of deployable resources, for the good of all.

*Information and Communications Technology for African Development: An Assessment of Progress and the Challenges Ahead* captures the essence of this intellectual process, combining history, analyses, strategies, programmes and activities in a comprehensive compendium on the state of play on technology for development. It brings together in one volume, the best thinking on the prospect and promise of ICT deployment for Africa's development and the strategies for their accomplishment.

For this reason, this book makes invaluable reading. I wholeheartedly recommend it to everyone involved in African development, not only those interested in ICT for development, and most especially, those interested in realizing Africa's aspiration to rapidly take its rightful place in the comity of nations and peoples, with pride, dignity and equanimity.