



HIGHLIGHTS FROM GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE 97 23 JUNE 1997

GK97 delegates convened in two Plenary sessions in the morning, on the Global Knowledge Agenda and on Investing in Knowledge, and in a dinner Plenary on Investing in Knowledge Infrastructure. Delegates met in a variety of working sessions during the afternoon.

PLENARY SESSIONS

THE GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE AGENDA

Diane Marleau, Canadian Minister for International Cooperation and Minister responsible for La Francophonie, emphasized the importance of equitable access for all and productive partnerships. She stressed that information must be practical and adaptable to local needs. Equitable access is founded upon literacy, numeracy and problem-solving. She highlighted the importance of education for girls, particularly in Africa, and emphasized that partnerships can facilitate equitable access. She said governments should guarantee that all citizens have access to information and foster an enabling environment for private sector investment in ICT.

James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, stressed the need to overcome the gap between rich and poor. The major challenge is to increase people's ability to access new technology, and success must be measured by impacts on poverty and development. He remarked that governments and institutions should be guided by the wishes of their citizens. He recalled Annan's observation that ignorance, not knowledge, constrains society, and he urged participants to strive for a better world.

José María Figueres, President of Costa Rica, stressed that the purpose of this conference is to discuss knowledge in the information age in the context of furthering the well-being of people. He outlined Costa Rica's experience and investments in health, infrastructure development, education, communications and institution-building. He stressed that of all these areas, education is the most important. He outlined many indicators of improvement, including: increased life expectancy; improved environmental indicators; and greater economic liberty. He suggested that sustainable development is a way of taking decisions that encompass all areas of action in society. He called for more work to provide access to ICT in order to ensure equality for all.

Yoweri K. Museveni, President of Uganda, stated that in the past, man has been oppressed by nature and by fellow men. He said science and technology enabled humanity to overcome the former, and only the universalization of knowledge will create an equilibrium where none will use knowledge to the detriment of others. He outlined the obstacles to access to knowledge in Uganda: illiteracy; archaic curricula; difficulties in the transmission of knowledge to farmers; and dormancy of ancient knowledge. He highlighted efforts to address these obstacles: reducing the cost of education and expanding secondary and university education; reforming curricula and allowing the demands of the labor market to shape curricula; expanding the network of extension workers; and working to bring products of

ancient knowledge to the marketplace. He stressed that as knowledge spreads across the globe and becomes more democratically owned, an adjustment in the world system will be essential, and all will have to find a niche where they can contribute to this knowledge.

INVESTING IN KNOWLEDGE

Maurice Strong, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General, chaired the Plenary. He stressed that although GK97 is focusing on knowledge, civilizational changes driven by the knowledge revolution are also at issue.

Joy Male, Administrator, Mengo Senior School, Kampala, Uganda, spoke of the pioneering school-to-school initiative (SSI) underway in Uganda. The SSI, a one-year pilot project started in 1996, has made computers, printers and, for the first time in Uganda, access to the Internet available to three schools. The SSI is very popular in the schools and local communities and is being used to network, share best practices and increase skills. She outlined challenges for the future: to ensure the program continues beyond the pilot project, and to carry the program forward into other schools.

Joseph E. Stiglitz, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank, emphasized that knowledge is the driving force behind economic development. He listed prerequisites of the telecommunication revolution, including: continued investment in human capital; an enabling environment for investments in new technologies; policies that ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared widely; creation of knowledge infrastructure; and democratic development. He stressed the importance of: effective competition leading to low prices and allowing the poor to participate; a regulatory structure to protect consumers; and political and regulatory stability.

John Manley, Canadian Minister of Industry, observed that advances in information technology are transforming industrial economies into knowledge-based economies. He emphasized that this state of "connectedness" provides new opportunities and has the potential to level the playing field between developed and developing nations. Developing countries can "leapfrog" old technologies and avoid regulatory and policy pitfalls. He stressed, however, that we must not lose sight of basic human values. He outlined several programs that Canada will initiate at home and abroad to improve access to IT tools and skills.

Fawzi Al-Sultan, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), stated that for knowledge to become a force for poverty alleviation, the poor require access to experiences of comparable communities, and their knowledge must be sharpened by access to outside knowledge in ways that enable them to select those elements most relevant to their needs. He said information is the cornerstone of sustainable development, and modern technologies must be made available to the poor. He outlined efforts by IFAD in this regard. He stressed that investment in knowledge represents a commitment to people and a better future for all.

Delegates also attended a Plenary dinner, sponsored by the GK97 private sector partners, where statements were delivered by: Michael Dell, Founder and Chairman, Dell Computer Corporation, Claude

Forget, Special Advisor to Chairman of the Board and CEO, Teleglobe, Inc., and Jean Monty, Vice-Chairman and CEO, Nortel. (Editor's Note: these speeches are available in RealAudio at <http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/sd/gk97/webcast.html>.)

WORKING SESSIONS

A variety of working sessions were held in the afternoon. Following are summaries from some of these sessions.

Partnership for Knowledge Sharing and Connectivity: Special Challenges in Africa: In this two-part session, it was noted that Africa was the last continent to be connected to the Internet. The Africa Information Society Initiative, which aims to enhance information infrastructure and ensure that every African has the information necessary to build economic capacity and exercise democratic rights, was described. Panelists addressed a range of social and technological issues, often noting that despite difficulties with costs, content and connectivity, there are numerous local success stories.

Voices for Choices: Participatory Innovations in Knowledge Creation: This session highlighted innovations in knowledge-building and participation in public policy deliberations by research, non-governmental and social action groups. Participants emphasized: why citizens do and do not participate in policy dialogue; successful uses of modern technology to spread information on human rights issues; the need for interaction between human rights and environmental movements; experiences of information training in Hungary and Peru; the North-South Institute's women's projects in Africa; and "gendered" information. Participants debated gender, equity and structural adjustment in Africa.

Tools and Technologies for Crisis Prevention and Disaster Relief: Panelists emphasized that humanitarian agencies are increasingly judged by their capacity to provide and use information, although some are falling behind in this respect. It was highlighted that agencies need to systematize and professionalize their information operations while simultaneously increasing the capacity of local organizations.

Building Knowledge Economies in Asia: Lessons from Experience and Challenges Ahead: Discussions focused on: drawing lessons from the Asian experience; forging links between industry, information and society; and investing in education. Some participants underscored making knowledge and ICT available and affordable, while others cautioned that income and knowledge gaps could increase if these changes are not made properly. Many new opportunities were presented, such as the use of telecommunications for disaster and emergency relief. It was also highlighted that the roles of the various players need to be more clearly defined.

IMF Surveillance in a World of Increasingly Integrated Capital Markets: This session focused on the need to provide timely and accurate data about domestic and international capital markets in order to enhance the stability and effectiveness of the global economic system. The IMF provides a number of services to achieve this, including its new website which offers current data on economic growth, government debt, national inflation and other key financial indicators (<http://dsbb.imf.org>).

Knowledge, Science and Engineering for Sustainable Development: Presentations were made on: the role of academic research in industrial and economic growth; global environmental issues; health; and agriculture. Participants stressed the importance of partnerships and suggested that science and technology, while facing challenges in the next century, will be key in addressing these issues. It was also noted that science and technology must be combined with appropriate policies and institutions to achieve sustainable development.

Environment: The Challenge of Sustainable Development: Participants discussed the relationship between knowledge, the economy and the environment. Some participants outlined the positive aspects of the relationship between the physical environment and human development, while others suggested that sustainable development is an unachievable oxymoron. Others stressed the importance of:

the appropriate application of knowledge for sustainable development; local-level implementation of technology; and viewing science and technology within a social and political context.

Mainstreaming Environment into Development Programs: Policies and Strategies for Education, Training and Communication: This session focused on the importance of integrating education, training and communication components into environment programs. Case studies from the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka were presented. Recommendations were made on: the importance of mutual learning, and technology as an effective means of reaching the local level.

Colloquium on Distance Education for Teacher Development: In this two-part colloquium, participants shared experiences on the challenges facing teacher development and how distance education solutions can be applied to address them. Examples of innovative approaches in Senegal and India were presented. An e-mail discussion group preparing for the colloquium identified difficulties, including educating policy makers on the benefits of distance education and linking distance education to social development and community concerns. Themes and questions included: how technology provides opportunities for distance education; how to manage distance education on a large scale while adapting it to different local systems; and curriculum issues. Panelists presented case studies of distance teacher education in Israel, Mexico and the UK. Participants: asked about fall-back plans when technology fails; discussed the benefits of using video-conferencing, radio, tutors and print to train teachers; and raised concerns regarding costs of new technologies for distance education. Participants raised questions regarding: quality assessment and the criteria by which to measure it; equity; and the outreach potential of distance education.

Classrooms Without Borders: Internet and Education: Participants discussed how to improve educational outcomes and global understanding through Internet-based distance learning activities. Four programs were presented, including the World Bank's "World Links for Development," which links students and teachers in developing countries with peers in industrialized countries for collaborative research, teaching and learning via the Internet. Discussions highlighted the importance of: content over technology; self-learning and student-centered, interactive learning; partnerships to facilitate Internet access; training teachers to integrate Internet into the classroom; and developing tools to assess the value of Internet use on the quality of education.

Spinning the Web: Linking the Voices of the South to a Global Sustainable Development Gateway: The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) brought together its regional and international partners to present their work on building a new gateway to sustainable development information on the Internet. Challenges facing organizations in developing countries in delivering their information electronically, as well as solutions to issues of telecommunications access, reliability and costs, were addressed. Discussion centered on CD-Rom production, low-end e-mail networks and diskette products. IISD explored how the diverse research and experience of these organizations are being brought to international attention at <http://sdgateway.iisd.ca/>.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

BREAKFAST: A breakfast, on Global Knowledge: A Partnership for Women and Men, will take place from 7:45-8:55 a.m. in the Sheraton Centre Grand Ballroom.

WORKING SESSIONS: Working sessions will meet from 9:00-10:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m., 2:30-4:00 p.m. and 4:30-6:00 p.m. in the Sheraton Centre, Hilton and Colony Hotels.

PLENARIES: There will be a Plenary lunch, on Knowledge for Good Governance, from 12:30-2:00 p.m. and a Plenary dinner, on Global Knowledge and Local Culture, from 7:00-10:00 p.m., both in the Sheraton Centre Grand Ballroom.