



## The Age of Digital Opportunity. Connecting the Generations.

**A Contribution in support to the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS)  
(Geneva - December 2003)**

In support of the World Summit on Information Society (December 2003), the conference of "Caring Communities for the 21st Century: Imagining the Possible 'Age of Connectivity'" was held at the United Nations Headquarters on February 12, 2003. The conference was organized by the International Council for Caring Communities (ICCC) in collaboration with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations programme on ageing of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations ICT Task Force, the Department of Public Information, the private sector, the NGO Committee on Ageing, United Nations/NY, and other NGOs.

This conference specifically linked the "Age of Longevity", to the "Age of Connectivity", examining the role that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can play in the lives of older people, while also exploring a means to harness the wisdom of different generations and promote development. In a world that by 2050 will show the number of older persons (60 or older) exceeding the number of the young (under age 15) for the first time in history, unique solutions to this challenge are necessary. ICT, when seen as an agent of change that can enrich a "Society of All Ages", offers one of these unique solutions and boundless opportunities for all countries and people.

The publication is being presented as a contribution to the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) being held in Geneva in December 2003, and is a collaborative effort by the International Council for Caring Communities (ICCC), the United Nations ICT Task Force, the Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) Information and Communication Technology for Development Division of the Sustainable Development Department, and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). The summit presents us with a unique opportunity to bring forward the issue of intergenerational ICT connectivity to a wide variety of partners including heads of governments, international organizations, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations. Contributing to the WSIS also presents the chance to inspire interactive discussion with these various development partners, leading to additional insights on a path of development for all societies and for all generations.

The publication aims to address the challenges put forward by the conference, "Caring Communities for the 21st Century: Imagining the Possible 'Age of Connectivity'". Providing a wide variety of insights from the conference, it presents an assortment of outlooks on how ICT and the phenomenon of ageing are interrelated. It includes recommendations on the answer to this challenge, as well as concrete experiences from practice. With this issue having had little previous exploration, it is important for us to provide a view from an extensive range of partners, including governments, non-governmental organizations, the UN family, the private sector and academia. The wonders of ICT can be useful for addressing the challenges of our changing, and ageing, world. To make this potential a reality, requires the inspiration, the commitment and the inclusion of all creative minds.

### **Why this issue?**

- The world we are living in is being influenced by a number of powerful global forces. Among these forces we see globalization, the revolution in Information Communication Technology (ICT), and the ageing of the world's population.
- For development strategies to succeed, we must consider this new global environment, providing an opportunity for all citizens of all countries to reap the benefits of development.

### **1. The Ageing of Societies**

- The ageing of the world's population will affect everyone in society, economically and socially, as well as culturally and politically.
- Major changes in ageing societies include a decrease in the traditional working-age population, and an increased demand for health and care services, to name a couple.
- Development processes must respond to the challenges put forth by these monumental demographic changes.

### **2. The Age of Connectivity**

- ICT is a powerful tool for development and a means to promote the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- We are living in a time of remarkable technological breakthroughs, while unfortunately the 'digital divide' has left many throughout the world isolated from their benefits.
- If these powerful new forces are left un-harnessed the digital gap may result in even greater disparities, leaving those left behind with further to hurdle.
- The 'Digital Divide' must be considered not only in terms of countries but also in terms of the individuals that comprise our societies.

### **3. Harnessing the Generations**

- Older people are the pioneers of past and to-day's innovations, bringing with them their knowledge and experience to create our future.
- Technology provides a means to harness this valuable input, not only connecting them to younger generations, but also providing for the promotion of development for society as a whole.

**"As we enter a new century and a new millennium, old and young - and all in between - are called upon to join in the common task of shaping a rapidly changing world. It is up to us, whatever our age, to ensure that no contribution to this endeavour is wasted because of age discrimination."**

**United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan**

<http://www.un.org/ageing>

For additional information please refer to the CD-ROM version of this publication available at the following websites: [www.unicttaskforce.org](http://www.unicttaskforce.org), [www.international-iccc.org](http://www.international-iccc.org), [www.iadb.org/ict4dev](http://www.iadb.org/ict4dev), [www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing), [www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)