

YOUTH AND ICT



HIGHLIGHTS

- Almost half the world's population is under the age of 25 and nearly a quarter are aged 12 to 24. Of those aged 12-24, nearly 40% live on less than two dollars a day.
- Youth employment is in crisis according to the ILO, which estimates that some 75 million are out of work as of 2012. That accounts for 41% of total global unemployment, and is not likely to recover until beyond 2016.
- By end-2013, mobile-cellular subscriptions will reach a penetration of 89% in developing countries. Internet user statistics are also surging, with 2.7 billion (39% of world population) expected to be online by the end of the year.
- Ongoing ITU research suggests that at present, around 43% of national strategies reference youth.
- Over the past five years, global fixed-broadband prices as a share of GNI per capita dropped by 82%. By 2012, fixed-broadband prices represented 1.7% of monthly GNI p.c. in developed countries. In developing countries, fixed-broadband services remain expensive, accounting for 30.1% of average monthly incomes.

Youth are an underestimated but growing force on the international stage. Almost half the world's population is under the age of 25 and nearly a quarter are aged 12 to 24¹. Of those aged 12-24, nearly 40% live on less than two dollars a day. Youth employment is in crisis according to the ILO, which estimates that some 75 million are out of work as of 2012². That accounts for 41% of total global unemployment, and is not likely to recover until beyond 2016³.

Clearly, issues and policies relating to young people are in dire need of attention at the level of the UN and government. Conspicuously missing from poverty reduction strategies of the past, the problems faced by young people have been overlooked and neglected. However, young people are increasingly earning recognition from governments and the international community as powerful agents of change whose inclusion in politics is vital to

¹ CIA World Factbook and US Global Population Census figures.

² ILO. *The youth employment crisis: A call for action*. Available here: http://www.ilo.org/washington/WCMS_185950/lang-en/index.htm

³ ILO. *World of Work Report 2012: Better Jobs for a better economy*. Available here: http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/world-of-work/WCMS_179453/lang-en/index.htm





improving democratic processes. Recent social movements like the Arab Spring, Spain's 15M, Mexico's YoSoy132 movement and student protests in countries around the world from Chile to the United Kingdom reaffirm the need to address Generation Y's call.

Technology – specifically ICT – has played a central role in young people's rise to prominence on a global scale. It has helped them mobilize, collaborate and given them a voice where there was none before. It has brought them together in response to social concerns. It has connected them across vast geo-political barriers.

The International Telecommunication Unit (ITU) and Broadband Commission research has shown the benefits of ICT access across all major sectors. For young people, access to information means better access to capital, markets and training needed to pursue a career or studies; increased participation in political processes, and recognition of youth as responsible citizens in today's society. Youth entrepreneurship – which is facilitated by access to technology, the internet and information – is fast being positioned as a solution for youth employment.

Young people are rising to the challenge by pioneering the use of ICT, and driving trends in what is a dynamic and major growth industry. While the good news is that they are using ICT – the challenge is to inspire them to use it to change their world in a positive way. National and international policy and regulatory bodies – governments, civil society and the UN – can help by recognizing and encouraging the accelerated use of information and communication technologies in development strategies and frameworks for the future. With ICTs playing a crucial role in applications across the world and at either end of the development spectrum, and with such a high impact on young people, their explicit reference in such strategies is essential.

The United Nation, Youth and ICTs

While access to technology and associated electronic content has significantly changed the lives of many young people in developed countries, this is not always the case for those in less developed countries. Access to ICTs such as computers, mobile phones and the Internet, especially broadband, remains a challenge for youth in the developing world. In addition, the cost of ICT access (mobile phones and Internet) is much higher as a proportion of per capita income in these particularly disadvantaged countries.

The challenge is bringing together all relevant stakeholders, including governments, civil society and the private sector, and encouraging them to work together to provide an environment that fosters the development of young people and enables them to realize their potential in the Information Society. ICTs transcend borders enabling the communication between young people from every corner of the world, helping in the promotion of dialogue and mutual understanding. It is important then that international cooperation in regards to the transfer of technology is fostered.





The United Nations recognizes young people as avid and creative users of ICTs, and as key contributors to building an inclusive Information Society and bridging the Digital Divide. In particular targeting girls and young women by promoting better and more inclusive access to ICT so as to promote their academic, social and economic development is crucial to not only bridging this digital divide, but also in helping close the gender gap.

In this sense, promoting universal, non-discriminatory, equitable and affordable access of youth to ICT is central to ensuring digital and social inclusion. Disadvantaged and marginalized youth, such as migrant and refugee youth, youth with HIV and AIDS, indigenous youth, youth with disabilities, rural youth, youth experiencing poverty, and those facing discrimination, are often excluded from access to ICTs. The effective allocation of resources so as to ensure equal opportunities and access to ICTs for youth living in vulnerable situations is critical to ensuring that ICTs are used and developed in an inclusive and equitable manner.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) produced goals with respect to the development and expansion of access to ICT globally. In particular, high priority was given to the role that ICT could play in relation to young peoples' education. The WSIS Geneva Plan of Action included goals to connect educational institutions with ICT by 2015 and to adapt school curricula to meet the challenges of the Information Society. The importance of capacity building and ICT literacy is also highlighted.

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) also highlights the importance of improving access to the Internet and to increase information technology literacy at large. WPAY recognizes that effective use of ICT should strengthen youth engagement. WPAY suggests a 3 pronged approach to support youth in their use of information and communication technologies. This aims at the adequate provision of media for young people, encourages participation by young people in the production of media and in the formation of media policy, and promotes education that emphasizes information and communication technology literacy as a significant dimension of contemporary citizenship.

Attention to young people and their ICT needs is also an essential component of the work of the United Nations Agency dealing with ICT matters, the International Telecommunication Unit (ITU). Amongst its work are digital inclusion activities, a main goal of which is to promote broadband school connectivity through its Connect a School, Connect a Community Initiative. By mainstreaming the youth agenda and offering projects and learning activities which provide young people with crucial ICT and life skills, ITU helps to boost their educational level, and therefore their economic potential.

There are more ICT users than ever before, with over five billion mobile phone subscriptions worldwide, and more than two billion Internet users. Likewise, in general, the cost of many ICT

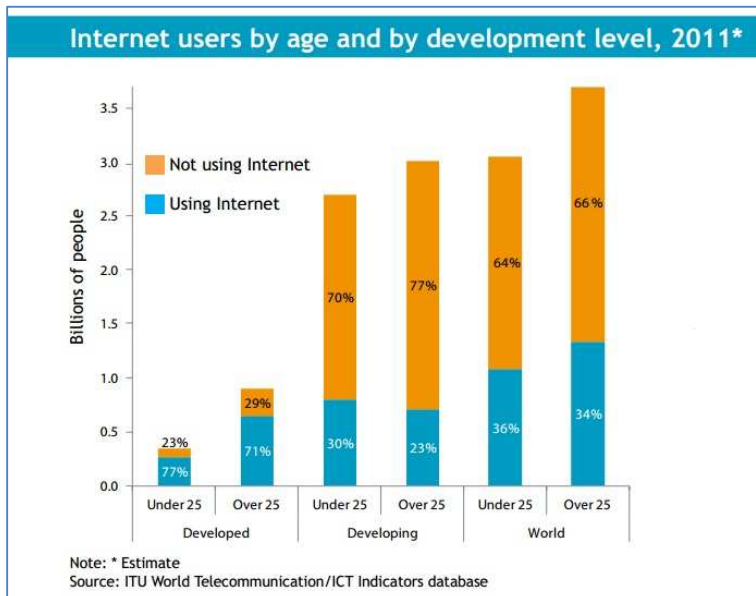


services is falling fast. Nevertheless, ICT affordability remains a concern, considering that the “ICT Price Basket” reveals the huge gaps that still exist between the haves and the have-nots. Indeed, ICT services remain much more affordable in the rich world than in the developing world. Broadband Internet access is perhaps the best and most important example of this.

Progress

With 6.8 billion mobile subscriptions globally, the world is more interconnected than ever before. ITU estimates that by end-2013, mobile-cellular subscriptions will reach a penetration of 89% in developing countries. Internet user statistics are also surging, with 2.7 billion (39% of world population) expected to be online by the end of the year⁴. This is seen to be growing at a rate of approximately 10% per annum.

In 2011, ITU estimated that young people under the age of 25 accounted for 45% of total internet users. Globally, 36% of young people aged less than 25 used the internet (compared with 34% of those 25 years and older), with vast disparities between developed and developing economies. In the developed world, 77% of young people under the age of 25 used the internet compared with 71% of those 25 years and older. In the developing world, 30% of the under 25-year-olds used the Internet compared with 23% of those 25 years and older. Despite these inequalities, the total number of Internet users that are below the age of 25 in developing countries is already three times as high as that in the developed world⁵.



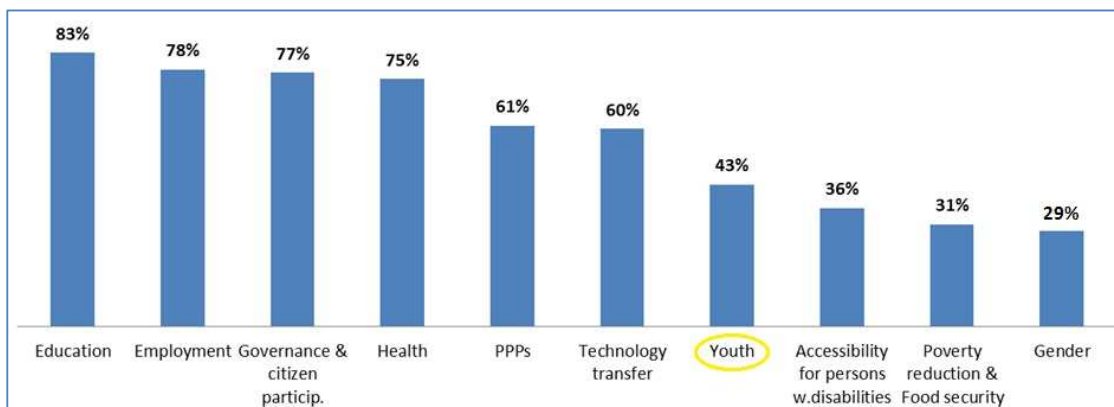
National policies and regulatory strategies are vital for ensuring that the future ICT needs of Generation Y are met. Not only in terms of access, ensuring that the networks can support increased traffic, but also in terms of training and programmes geared towards the empowerment of young people. Basic ICT literacy not only qualifies people for jobs in conventional sectors, but also opens doors for them to participate in rapidly growing markets such as business process outsourcing, crowdsourcing, and microwork. People with more advanced ICT skills can take advantage of an even wider range of opportunities brought about by the growth of the ‘app economy’, mobile phones,

⁴ ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database.

⁵ ITU

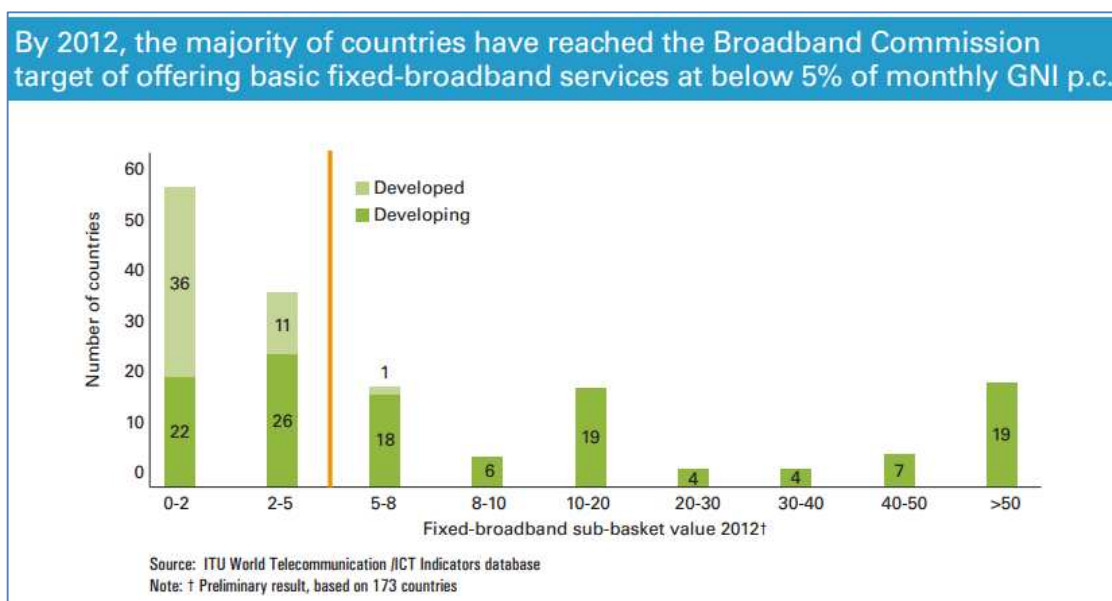
social media, games, and other technologically-driven areas, fueling new business ventures in every sector.

National ICT and broadband strategies should reflect these dynamics with regards to young people to realize the full potential of the digital revolution. Ongoing ITU research suggests that at present, around 43% of national strategies reference youth (see figure below).



Source: ITU

Access is also becoming more affordable. Over the past five years, global fixed-broadband prices as a share of GNI per capita dropped by 82%. By 2012, fixed-broadband prices represented 1.7% of monthly GNI p.c. in developed countries. In developing countries, fixed-broadband services remain expensive, accounting for 30.1% of average monthly incomes. However, there are promising signs for the developing world. In 95 countries – including 48 developing countries – the price of a monthly fixed-broadband subscription represented 5% or less of monthly GNI p.c. in 2012⁶.



⁶ ITU

The way forward

ICT has a major role to play in educational facilities at every level. Measurement of ICT use in schools and universities worldwide and analysis of the connection between the quality of education and optimal ICT use are important endeavours, with the ultimate goal being the improvement of educational standards, access and opportunities.

ICT, civic inclusion and political participation

Broadband limitations, both in terms of infrastructure and price, have led to the innovation of "narrowband" mobile communications applications tailored for users in developing countries such as text messaging and scaled-down social networking.⁷ In essence, mobile phones are now providing new avenues for increasing numbers of citizens in the developing world to access the benefits of broadband internet. The widespread use of mobile phones together with innovative forms of social networking is creating new spaces for citizens to engage in civic activity and governance. As one youth leader in Tanzania noted "There is a huge difference since 2005, when young people were not very aware of their rights or their opinions regarding what should be done in their country. Recently, the spread of mobile phones has made youth more politically aware and active; most youth have social media enabled mobile phones and are using these platforms to access information and voice their opinions"⁸.

ICTs can engage and motivate youth to get involved in developing and learning about their communities and thus forge increased commitment and empowerment. For instance, citizen journalism, user-generated content, reporting, and neighbourhood videos and music are attractive and constructive ways to get youth engaged in positive local development processes. Young leaders in Kenya have attributed the access of information as an empowering agent allowing youth to "hold their head high and walk into a meeting with government officials. Knowledge is power, power is self-esteem."⁹

Current ICT-enabled communication between government and citizens is already having an impact on youth, making them feel more connected, engaged and heard. Even when ICT-based government initiatives are not youth-focused, young people perceive such communication as being directed primarily to their age group.

⁷ ICT4D 2012: Maximizing Mobile, World Bank, p. 13.

⁸ Interview with Thomas Maqway, July 2012 for the UN Habitat Report on ICT, Youth and Governance

⁹ Interview with Kepha Ngito, MAP Kibera, July 2012 from the UN Habitat Report on ICT, Youth and Governance

The foundation of an ICT-ready labour force

The knowledge society/the digital economy and the ubiquitous use of ICTs in almost every aspect of human life has made it necessary for people to have digital skills to effectively use, create and innovate with ICTs. Moreover, a growing number of jobs across all sectors require ICT skills, which has led many experts to conclude that ICT and digital skills are key to successful participation in the labour market¹⁰.

Despite this need, the promise of ICTs has not been realized in formal educational systems. Research by the OECD illustrates the limitations in traditional models of education, as they are not adequately preparing students to meet the demands of a changing job market¹¹. Furthermore, seizing the potential of ICTs for education requires the development and implementation of national policies/programmes aimed at integrating ICTs in education as a whole, and better responding to labour market needs¹². It thus requires a coordinated approach across various ministries and levels of government. In some countries ministries of labour, telecommunications, youth or human development, education and even industry work together to identify common areas of interest and targeted activities.

Promoting ICT skills development in extracurricular educational settings shows that one can acquire ICT skills almost anywhere. These are out-of-classroom opportunities which governments need to pay attention to and support if they want to foster an ICT-savvy, innovative labour force. To date, most activities have been supported and initiated by non-government entities and the private sector. What is needed now is for governments at all levels to take proactive steps to take advantage of these efforts.

For further information:

- <http://undesadspd.org/Youth.aspx>
- http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/Youth_2008.pdf
- <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=531>

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¹⁰ ITU

¹¹ OECD. Science Technology and Industry Outlook 2012. Available here:
<http://www.oecd.org/sti/oecdscientechnologyandindustryoutlook.htm>

¹² Broadband Commission