COMMITTEE : Digital Inclusion

ISSUE: How can governments work with the private sector to ensure universal and affordable access to digital technology, while preserving technological sovereignty of developing countries?

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PRESIDENCY :



Hello dear delegates,

My name is Sarah WEISROCK, I am 16 years old and I am a student in the British section at the Lycée International of Ferney-Voltaire. I speak three languages: French, English and Hungarian.

I'm really passionate about sports. I compete in golf and I also enjoy playing tennis, cycling and volleyball. Alongside this, music plays an important part in my life: I play the piano at the Ferney-Voltaire Conservatoire of Music and I'm currently learning the guitar. I also like to express my creativity through drawing and painting.

Last year, I was lucky enough to join FerMUN as an admin. This experience allowed me to discover how a MUN conference works from the inside, but also to appreciate the importance of teamwork and organisation. I was particularly inspired by the role of the committee chairs, which made me want to get more involved this year as a Chair.

At FerMUN 2027, we will be examining a major issue of our time: digital inclusion.

Throughout the debates, we will reflect together on ways to bridge the digital divide, promote innovation, develop balanced partnerships between public and private sector stakeholders, and ensure that technological advances benefit everyone, without compromising the independence of the most vulnerable states.

I look forward to meeting you, hearing your ideas and debating with you !

KEY WORDS

Private Sector[1]: The private sector consists of businesses that are independent of the state. They are established and managed by private individuals or entities and provide goods and services, often with the aim to make profit from it.

Technological sovereignty[2]: Technological sovereignty signifies the capacity of a nation, organization, or even an individual to possess autonomous control over their technological infrastructure, data, and capabilities.

Developing countries[3]: Developing country, a country which, relative to other countries, has a lower average standard of living.

Universal Access[4]: Ensuring everyone, regardless of background, has fair opportunity to resources and dignified life essentials.

Numerical divide[5] : Digital divide is inequitable access to and use of digital technology, encompassing four interrelated dimensions: motivational, material, skills, and usage access.The digital divide worsens inequality in access to information and resources.

Digital infrastructure [6]: Digital infrastructure comprises the fundamental technological building blocks that support the digital world. It goes beyond simply providing connectivity; it fosters a platform for innovation, enabling businesses and individuals to leverage digital capabilities for productivity, communication, and entertainment.

LDC[7]: Least Developed Countries

VPN[8] : A virtual private network (VPN) is an overlay network that uses network virtualization to extend a private network across a public network, such as the Internet, via the use of encryption and tunneling protocols.

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[1] Private sector - Wikipedia
[2] Technology Sovereignty → Term
[3] Developing country | Definition, Characteristics, Economy, & Origin | Britannica Money
[4] Universal Access → Term
[5] Digital divide - Wikipedia
[6] What is digital infrastructure? - California Learning Resource Network
[7] Least developed countries - Wikipedia
[8] Virtual private network - Wikipedia

OVERVIEW

I. Digital inequalities in developing countries.

A. Universal access to digital technology: a major issue nowadays [9].

In the modern world, digital technology plays a major role in our daily lives, and as the years go by, the number of users continues to rise. It is therefore important that everyone has access to the internet and digital technologies.

According to the ITU, 5.4 billion people, representing 67% of the world's population, use the internet. In Europe, in the Commonwealth of Independent States (an intergovernmental organisation comprising nine of the fifteen former Soviet republics) and in America, around 90% of the population uses the internet. It is estimated that two-thirds of the population in the Arab states and the Asia-Pacific region use the internet, which is in line with the global average. However, only 37 per cent of the African population uses the Internet nowadays.

Universal digital access presents several major concerns, for instance in social issues[10] (equal opportunities for all, participation in a modern society), economic issues[11] (job creation, innovation, trade and sustainable development), technological challenges[12] (the development of digital infrastructure), political challenges[13] (digital transformation reshaping the structure of public administrations), educational challenges[14] digital technology must be a tool used in this technology-driven world) and, finally, health-related challenges[15] (modern technology aids the healthcare sector)

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[9] Community challenges: Digital Divide: Technology Challenges in Underserved Communities - FasterCapital

[10] Leaving no one behind means leaving no one offline | 联合国

[11] World Social Report 2026 - The New Economics of Social Inclusion: Making Transformations Work for All | DESA Publications / Digital fragmentation could slow the pace of innovation | World Economic Forum / Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure | Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme

[12] UN plan calls for real progress towards ending internal displacement crisis | UN News

[13] PowerPoint Presentation

[14] Digital divide in education | OECD

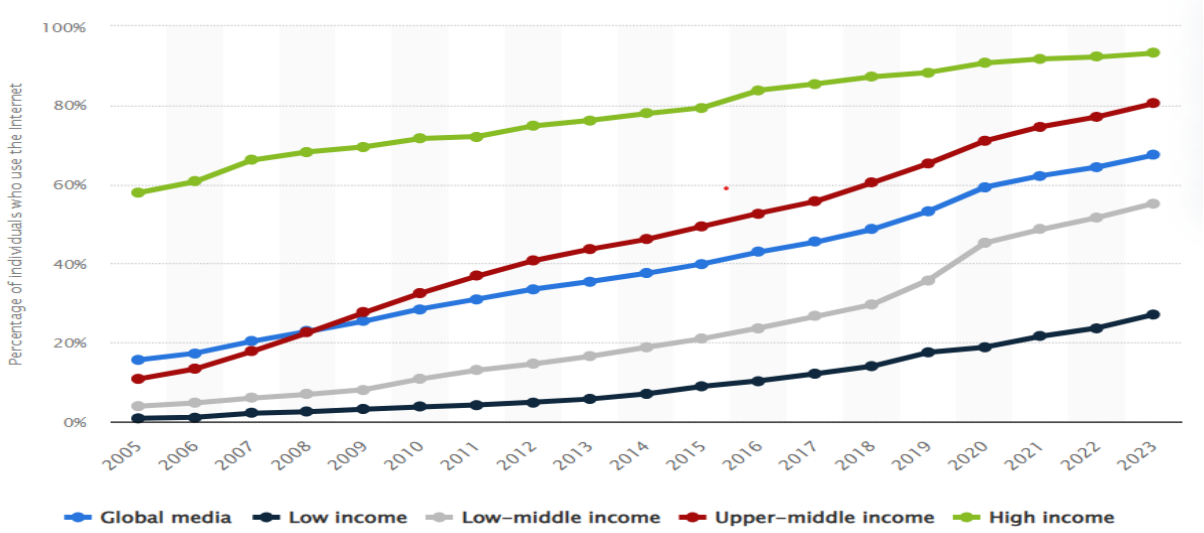
[15] (PDF) Bridging the digital health divide: a narrative review of the causes, implications, and solutions for digital health inequalities /Rethinking the digital divide in health: a critical interpretive synthesis of research literature - PMC

B. The main barriers to digital access in developing countries.

Developing countries often have poor telecommunications infrastructure, which limits access to the internet and, as a result, makes it difficult to attract investors to help develop their economies. Furthermore, the cost of digital infrastructure such as fibre-optic cables, antennae and data centres can be high for some countries, which acts as a barrier to the installation of digital networks.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the African Union Commission estimate that nearly $155 billion per year will need to be mobilised until 2040 to close the gaps in key sectors, including the digital sector. Low levels of investment in research and development are holding back countries in the Global South[16].

Percentage of the population with internet access, according to their country's income:[17]

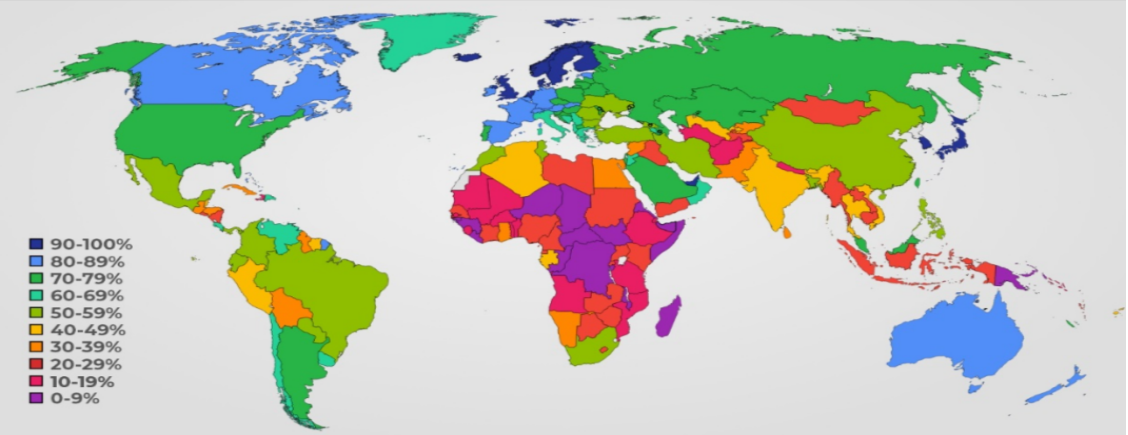


Here we can see a significant global trend in internet access, but also a digital divide. The higher a country's income, the greater its rate of growth over time. This stands at around 95% for high-income countries, compared with 25% for the least developed countries. Thus, the gap between countries in terms of internet access remains significant.

[16] Digitally empowering Least Developed Countries: 5 steps for driving impact | United Nations Development Programme/Africa's Development Dynamics 2024 | OECD / Closing the Technology Gap in Least Developed Countries | United Nations

[17] *Internet penetration in countries according to the country's income level| Statista*

Countries with the highest internet penetration rates in 2023: [18]



The world map reveals a divide between the North, which has a significantly higher internet penetration rate, and the South, which has a relatively low rate. On average, the rate is 80 per cent in the North compared with 35% in the South. This clearly demonstrates the inequality in internet penetration rates across the world.

Developing countries often face network-related problems. The UN states that "structural constraints are one of the main causes, with marked disparities between LDCs and other countries in areas such as science, technology and innovation (STI)". The digital divide persists between rural and urban areas, with city residents likely to be twice as likely to be online as those in rural areas (76% compared with 39%).

In LDCs (Least Developed Countries), connection speed and reliability are often insufficient for essential uses (such as online education or remote working). For example, according to several international estimates, the African continent accounts for less than 1% of global hyperscale data centre capacity (the massive expansion of computing capacity, generally for big data or cloud computing) and a share of global research into artificial intelligence, according to Jean Philippe MEIYE (Analyst of African digital, educational and strategic issues).[19]

[18] *https://cdn.internetadvisor.com/img/blog/key-internet-statistics/8d2612039bcf72e2d64e377a3469429f.jpg*

[19] Digital sovereignty with a foot of clay: Africa's real challenge is not technological, it is human! | Financial Afrik

II) Digital Aid for Developing Countries: Between Infrastructure Support and Loss of Sovereignty.

A. Digital Industry Players in Developing Countries

- **Starlink:**

One of the main obstacles in developing countries is limited or expensive access to the internet. Donor countries are funding the construction and upgrading of mobile networks, fibre-optic networks and satellite solutions. Starlink is an ambitious project by SpaceX aimed at deploying a constellation of low-Earth orbit satellites to provide high-speed internet access worldwide. By offering global coverage, Starlink could help bridge the digital divide and facilitate internet access for previously isolated communities. [20]

For example, in 2025, Starlink signed agreements with Airtel Africa and the Vodacom Group to improve connectivity in remote areas of Africa.[21]

- **GAFAM and BATX:**

Today, digital technologies are concentrated mainly in the United States and China, two major powers that largely control the technology sector.

The GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft) dominate much of Europe, the Americas and Africa, whilst the BATX (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent and Xiaomi) dominate parts of Asia and the rest of the world, although they remain less dominant than the United States.

For example, Facebook, Microsoft and Google are investing in undersea cables and fibre-optic networks to improve connectivity, including in certain areas of Africa and Asia. This infrastructure facilitates access to the internet, which is often limited in developing countries. According to mobile service providers, by June 2024, these giants collectively own and finance more than 70% of new global cable projects. [22]

- **UNDP:**

To ensure universal and affordable access to digital technology, governments and the private sector play complementary roles. They collaborate within the framework of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The UNDP acts as a facilitator, bringing together governments, businesses, NGOs (non-governmental organisations).

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[20] Starlink et l'Accessibilité Numérique : Une Révolution pour les Personnes en / Situation de Handicap ? - Com Inclusive / Starlink and the Digital Divide - TelecomWorld101.com

[21] Starlink en Afrique : Partenariat stratégique confirmé avec Airtel et Vodacom - Tech In Africa Français/Airtel and Spacex Partner for Starlink in Africa - Angola /Vodacom and Starlink Partnership Expands African Broadband Access - tech-ish/Starlink Partners with Airtel & Vodacom to Improve Internet Access in Underserved Regions - Silicon Africa

[22] Câbles sous-marins : les GAFAM dominent le réseau mondial /Gafam gets their hands on submarine cables to better control the internet

The UNDP stated in its 2023 annual report that their" partnerships in 2023 included Member States, UN agencies, international financial institutions, civil society and NGOs, academia, and the private sector. "[23]

- **The world Bank:**

The World Bank is an international financial institution that provides loans and other financial support to developing countries for investment projects. It aims to "accelerate digital inclusion for 180 million people in Eastern and Southern Africa".[24]

For this project, $2.48 billion is being funded by the International Development Association (IDA) and the World Bank to ensure internet coverage.[25]

- **The private sector:**

Partnerships between governments and the private sector play a vital role in digital development. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) advocates cooperation by promoting partnerships between governments, private enterprises and other stakeholders.

According to the Development Cooperation Network, "the private sector is a key player in the aid system". Indeed, the private sector plays an increasingly important role in development, as these companies are involved at almost every level of the aid system, particularly in the financial sector, with official development assistance (ODA) within public-private partnerships.[26]

For example: MTN Rwanda is a collaboration with the Rwandan government. Founded in 1998, it is now the market leader in the telecommunications sector in Rwanda.[27]

Then there is Safaricom, a Kenyan telecommunications company, which, through its M-Pesa mobile payment service, is helping to promote digital and financial inclusion.[28]

B. Dependence and the challenges associated with the technological aid provided to developing countries

Technological dependence on foreign actors is a situation in which countries or companies rely on a foreign entity that possesses more advanced technology for services, software, etc.

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[23] Annual Report 2023 | UNDP/ Partnering | Annual Report 2023 | UNDP

[24] World Bank to accelerate digital inclusion for 180 million people across Eastern and Southern Africa

[25] unsouthsouth.org/ Digital and AI | World Bank Group - @A Billion/South-South Cooperation /State of South-South cooperation

[26] Baisse historique de l'APD mondiale en 2025 /Réaction de ONE aux données préliminaires de l'OCDE sur l'APD en 2025 - ONE.org France

[27] À propos - MTN Rwanda

[28] Safaricom Innovation Strategy 2026: AI, M-Pesa Expansion, and Kenya's Startup Ecosystem Growth - Tech In Africa

This lack of technological sovereignty leads to a slowdown in innovation and the true needs of each state.
The GAFAM and BATX companies collect and exploit personal data, which has become the 'new strategic resource' of the digital world. Their control over information flows gives them public, economic and social influence within other countries. In Africa, dependence on these giants creates a problem of digital sovereignty: their infrastructure (clouds, undersea cables, social media) largely escapes national control.
The semiconductors that power the global digital economy are mainly produced in Asia or the United States. Africa therefore remains heavily dependent on the technologies they use.29

By relying on private companies, particularly foreign ones (such as cloud providers, Google, Starlink, etc.) or on financial flows such as ODA (Official Development Assistance), states become dependent on their technology, digital infrastructure, etc.
One of the most significant consequences of this digital dependence is security. Indeed, data may be stored or processed by foreign technology centres, undermining national security. For instance, the Cloud Act allows US authorities to access data hosted outside their territory.
Furthermore, since 2013, China has been developing the 'New Silk Roads' [30] and investing heavily in digital infrastructure (in Europe and Africa). It is rolling out 5G there through Huawei, thereby reinforcing developing countries' dependence on Chinese technology.

In conclusion, partnerships between governments and the private sector must be regulated to promote digital development without creating excessive dependence on foreign actors.

[29] Une souveraineté numérique au pied d'argile : le vrai défi de l'Afrique n'est pas technologique, il est humain ! | Financial Afrik (translate to english)
[30] The New Silk Road: Transforming Global Trade Infrastructure - RYB /The New Silk Roads: Digital, Physical, and Strategic

ITU TREATIES AND MAJOR EVENTS

12/12/2003

The Geneva Action Plan 2023 was adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), organized by the ITU and the UN. This international framework aims to bridge the digital divide by promoting cooperation among nations, particularly with the private sector and international organizations. It also promotes access to ICTs, or information and communication technologies.

18/11/2005

The Tunis Commitment was adopted during the second phase of the WSIS, organized by the ITU and the UN. It reaffirms the objectives of the 2003 Geneva Plan of Action and also aims to bridge the digital divide. In addition, this document calls for action to combat digital inequalities, emphasizing collaboration while allowing states the flexibility to develop their own digital policies.

23/05/2001

Budapest Convention on Cybercrime—The Budapest Convention on Cybercrime is the first international treaty aimed at preventing and combating cybercrime and harmonizing national laws to improve international cooperation. This treaty promotes the protection of computer systems, data, and digital infrastructure. Furthermore, it contributes to technological sovereignty, enabling states to better secure their digital infrastructure and data.

25/07/2015, New York

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — UN 2030 Agenda — The SDGs are an international framework for political commitment adopted by 193 UN member states. They aim to promote inclusive development. For example, SDG 9 encourages infrastructure development, innovation, and access to digital technologies to prevent a digital divide and support developing countries.

22/07/2024

Global Digital Compact—This digital compact advocates for an international commitment to promote a more open, equitable, and secure digital environment. At the same time, it encourages digital sovereignty and helps prevent the digital divide.

POSSIBLES SOLUTIONS

→ **Establish public-private partnerships (PPPs)** so that governments can collaborate with private companies to develop digital infrastructure while maintaining control over technological resources.

→ **Adopt a regulatory framework with safeguards:** Governments must establish laws that promote private investment while protecting data and technological sovereignty.

→ **Ensure inclusive and affordable access:** Governments can introduce financial assistance and discounted pricing policies to provide everyone—particularly in rural areas—with affordable access to digital services.

→ **Support local businesses:** Governments can encourage startups and local businesses to develop domestic digital production.

→ **Diversify partnerships:** Diversifying suppliers helps limit excessive dependence. Therefore, collaborating with multiple foreign countries further ensures technological sovereignty.

→ **Cooperate with international organizations:** States can work with organizations such as the ITU to receive technical and financial support.

→ **Develop digital skills:** Governments can establish training centers so that the population can master digital tools.

GUIDED QUESTIONS

1. Why has universal and affordable digital access become a major issue for countries' development?
2. How do governments collaborate with the private sector?
3. Who are the main actors involved in digital development in developing countries, and what are their roles?
4. What are the major obstacles preventing developing countries from ensuring equitable digital access?
5. What risks might such collaborations pose to technological sovereignty?
6. What role do international organizations play in bridging the digital divide?
7. What examples of public-private partnerships show that it is possible to develop digital infrastructure while preserving technological autonomy?

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