



Launched in March 1998 at the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-98) in Valletta, Malta, EC-DC crosses a number of ITU-D programmes aimed at bridging the Digital Divide. EC-DC activities are mostly funded by public and private sector organizations. As an implementation of ITU **Valletta Action Plan (VAP)** and **ITU Plenipotentiary Resolutions**, and with the support of many leading private sector ICT companies and several ITU Administrations, EC-DC is focused on concrete deliverables based on its four main objectives:

- 1 **Infrastructure Development** – Coordinate the establishment of e-transaction infrastructure.
- 2 **Human Resources Development** – Develop local capacity in e-transaction technologies.
- 3 **Policies and Strategies** – Address policy and strategy issues related to e-transactions.
- 4 **Partnership with Industry** – Forge neutral and non-exclusive partnerships with industry.

After the successful launch of EC-DC, this initiative is now being expanded to more than 100 countries in Africa, the Americas, the Arab States, Asia and Pacific and Europe and CIS. Initially focused on e-commerce, this initiative is being expanded to secure e-transaction infrastructure using Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) to provide services such as e-business and e-government. More than 220 organizations including telecom operators, ministries, chambers of commerce, Internet Service Providers, trade associations and federations, NGOs and financial institutions are participating in EC-DC activities. The Partnership Agreement with the World Trade Centre (WTC) Geneva and the World Internet Secure Key (WiSeKey SA) has resulted in an operational EC-DC centre in Viet Nam. Later this year, ITU and WiSeKey will start the deployment of a global PKI in participating countries. In June 1999, EC-DC was presented with an innovative project award by the Global Bangemann Projects Challenge in Stockholm, Sweden, and cited in *Time Magazine* of July 2000, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *International Security Review* and several national and international media as an activity to watch out for. Within the context of the four objectives, activities are undertaken in the following areas:

Infrastructure Development: With WTC Geneva, WiSeKey and many private sector companies, projects to build e-transaction infrastructures in more than 100 countries the world over are being deployed. In addition to the 100+ countries, there are other projects in Bhutan, Brazil (for more than 60,000 businesses), Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chile, Cuba, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Saint Lucia, and Venezuela.

Gender Equality: ITU is providing technical and financial assistance (CHF 100,000) to a 3500-member association of women entrepreneurs (ASAFE) representing several countries. With the financial support of the Government of Japan, this project empowers women entrepreneurs as active players in the digital economy. To be operational in June 2001, this Internet and e-commerce activity aims at establishing a sustainable e-commerce and Internet service for ASAFE. Other activities include a Women's cyber forum in Cameroon and a joint ITU/UNIFEM forum at the United Nations in New York for women from all regions of the world.

Assistance to Least Developed Countries (LDCs): More than 23 LDCs from all regions are benefiting from assistance provided by ITU and industry partners in establishing e-transaction infrastructure and in addressing policy and strategy issues. ITU has actively participated in various workshops and seminars with particular emphasis on assisting LDCs in setting up their e-commerce endeavours. As an example, ITU assisted the Nigerian Regulatory Agency to organize an e-commerce workshop in September 2000 for the Afrinet2000 Internet Summit. A workshop for the Asian sub-region (Cambodia, Lao P.D.R. and Viet Nam) took place in October 2000.

Human Resources Development (HRD): Within the HRD framework, training workshops have been organized for the Americas Region in Latin America, notably in Chile, Brazil, and Venezuela, as well as in Africa, specifically in Cameroon, Mali, and Mauritius; also for the Asia-Pacific Region, particularly in Malaysia and Pakistan; and for the Arab States Region, notably in Egypt, the Sultanate of Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. A training workshop for more than 500 participants from 100+ developing countries, sponsored by industry partners, took place from 27 to 29 November 2000 at ITU, Geneva. More than 27 courses and seminars on ICT have been given in the centre for training and development created in Venezuela as a result of the MoU with FUNDANDINA, Venezuela. For 2001, training workshops and seminars are planned for the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and in Mali, the Russian Federation, and Tunisia.

Policies and Strategies: Activities to address e-transaction policies have taken place in Africa, Arab Region, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Some of these activities include: Bamako 2000 (Mali), Developing and Enhancing the Competitive Advantage in Mauritius, Afrinet2000 in Nigeria, CTO Conference in Malaysia, Basic E-Commerce Training in Pakistan, AFCOM99 in the United States, ITU Telecom Americas 2000, ITU Regional Development Seminar in Egypt, AMS/ICC E-business Conference in the Sultanate of Oman, IIR Conference in Geneva, and in several other locations. In January 2001, a seminar was held in Cameroon to define a national policy for e-transactions and ICTs. The outcome of this seminar was a set of recommendations for concrete actions to be undertaken by the Government of Cameroon. With the support of ITU, a national framework for e-commerce was established in Morocco. This led to the implementation of a national e-commerce infrastructure with the participation of several ministries, businesses and representatives of industry. Other events addressing e-commerce policy and strategies are scheduled for other regions. Presentations are planned to take place in Mali (Bamako 2001), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (E-Commerce Workshop for Eastern Caribbean States), the Russian Federation (Regional Seminar on E-Commerce for CIS Countries), and in Tunisia (ITU Regional E-Commerce Conference).

Partnership and Financing: Agreements have been signed with FUNDANDINA in Venezuela, the WTC Geneva and WISeKey SA, also in Geneva. To date, industry partners have contributed more than USD 5 million in in-kind contributions to the EC-DC project. Very successful private sector meetings took place on 15 June 2000 to increase the participation of the private sector in EC-DC. The solutions developed as a result of this meeting were presented on 14 September and 10 October 2000 in Geneva and demonstrated live in November 2000. These solutions are being provided free to developing and least developed countries that are ITU Member States. In May 2001, ITU and WISeKey launched a secure portal including a secure B2B e-marketplace based on PKI and announced a technology-neutral approach for the deployment of this global PKI. As a result of the private sector meeting held in January 2001, decisions were taken to further increase the level of private sector participation in EC-DC by simplifying the technical constraints of introducing competing technologies within the framework of the ITU-WTC-WISeKey Partnership Agreement. ITU is finalizing discussions with a law firm that has offered to provide free assistance to developing countries to establish their legislative framework for e-transactions and discussions are ongoing with other United Nations organizations to establish partnership agreements to further expand this ITU initiative with the support of these organizations and in their areas of competence.

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