

e-Brazil: ICT for Development

By Cid Torquato

Brazil has been playing a major role in the preparatory process of the World Summit on the Information Society. Stakeholders from the government, business, academy and civil society have managed to develop a methodology



Photo: Eduardo de Souza

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of interaction, discussion, formulation and action, that has achieved consensus and common positioning regarding most of the main issues of the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action.

Reflecting the multi-sector interlocution pioneered in the present World Summit, our work on the Brazilian official contributions and participation has given birth to a permanent multi-sector forum, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on the Information Society, also responsible for studying ways to absorb the results of the WSIS into our national policies.

In this process, our business leaders have made a point in defending the principle of technology neutrality in public and regulatory policies, as well as the importance of intellectual property rights as means of economic development. Such positioning has been encrypted in the Brazilian Contribution and the Bavarro Declaration.

As a result, Brazil has been able to present itself as a relevant regional and global actor in ICT-related multi-lateral negotiations, at the same time as it shows the world the progresses of its Digital Economy. The WSIS represents a strategic opportunity to further promote and showcase our sophisticated tech industry for export. Brazil has the infrastructure to become an international player in the ICT market, but there is still a lot to be done in our communications strategies in order to create worldwide awareness about our strengths and expertise in this field. We have to work hard to make it internationally known that Brazil has one of the most

developed e-banking systems in the world, that our last general elections were 100% digital, that 95% of income tax declarations are submitted via e-mail and that high-tech regional airplanes head our list of export items. Not many people realize that the ICT (hardware, software and telecommunications) internal market's annual turnover surpasses US\$ 80 billion, that the country has over 90 million telephone lines (fixed and mobile), 30 million computers, 25 million Internet users and 500,000 registered domain names, that e-retail grosses around US\$ 2 billion and B2B has reached impressive US\$ 25 billion in transactions in 2003.

To attract investments and set the basis of our export industry, government and private sector are currently working together on what's being called The New Industrial Policy, which will foster software, semiconductors and components as Brazil's most strategic sectors for the next two decades. Actually, this is good news not only for Brazilians, but for South and Latin Americans in general, who will certainly benefit from the strengthening of Brazil as a regional e-platform.

We know that the path to become an international ICT commercial player won't be an easy one, but we are absolutely positive that this is the only way to avoid external vulnerability and to pursue sustainable development for the country's economy as a whole.

More than ever, government, business, universities and NGOs have to join forces to translate it all into policy and action. This article is surely a very important step in this process.