# Touré on Telecoms

InterComms talks to Dr Hamadoun Touré about the success and role of the ITU in the future development of telecoms

**Q: With the deployment of technologies such as WiMAX, do you see these being able to be used to bridge the digital divide – or will they generate a further gap?**

**A:** WiMAX is certainly one of the most promising new technologies for connecting under-served regions, which is why ITU was pleased to see it integrated into the IMT-2000 family of 3G wireless standards. Its spectrum allocation in the lower frequency bands makes it very resilient and suitable for carrying data over the long distances needed to provide effective access to rural and remote, under-populated areas. This ability to span long distances also greatly reduces the number of transmitters needed, making it a low cost solution for developing regions.

**Q: The downturn in the world economy has led to a shrinking of global trade and a stalling of many ICT projects. Do you view the role of UN bodies like ITU as a key facilitator for moving projects forward in the developing world?**

**A:** There's no doubt that the worldwide economic downturn adversely affected the ICT sector, just as it impacted every other business sector.

But while equipment manufacturers have been hit hard, our industry is very resilient. We already battled our own crisis in 2002-2003, and we learned some tough lessons that are now standing us in good stead. Most ICT companies are now lean, efficient, and in good shape to weather the storm.

We should also remember that the ICT industry has created more jobs over the past five years than any other single industrial sector. Demand for mobile telephony services, particularly in developing economies, remains strong, and large emerging markets like Brazil, China, India and Nigeria are still registering good levels of subscriber growth, even if those figures are expected to be lower than in previous years.

As a UN agency, the crisis has put extra emphasis on our unique role as a facilitator of cooperation between the public and private sectors, and on our campaign to try to forge strategies to bridge the broadband divide.

The crisis has clearly shown how critical the role of government really is in large-scale infrastructure development like ICT networks. It has also shown that governments believe, as ITU does, in the key role of ICT as an economic driver that can help pull the world out of the current crisis.

This is because ICT has not only proved a highly resilient sector in its own right, it has the power to drive economies in other sectors – through e-commerce, e-education, e-health, and e-government. That's why so many governments around the world have announced ICT infrastructure-based stimulus packages. Many of these focus on broadband, because this is the technology that will empower us to develop more new services, applications and efficiencies.

This is also the reason why it is so critical that ITU does what it can to help avoid the emergence of a new 'broadband divide' just as we are finally beginning to bridge the Digital Divide.

**Q: With your extensive experience in helping drive telecommunications development through your former role as Director of ITU-D, what are your views on the principal ways the ITU can lead over the next few years?**

**A:** In troubled financial times, companies are looking to maximize their investments and reduce their risk. They may be less willing to stake large quantities of money on different proprietary technologies; increasingly they are seeking collaborative partnerships and examining ways to share technology and investments to reduce costs.

As the leading UN agency for ICTs, ITU is able to bring the top names from industry, government and regulators together for major events such as ITU Telecom World 2009. Through our unique, broad membership base, ITU bridges the public and private sectors, helping companies speak to other companies, to governments and to regulators. Our role as an 'honest broker' will be a critical one for ITU ►

over the next few years, as governments and industry alike look anew to partnerships that will stimulate the economy and promote the development of new networks and services.

And of course ITU will continue to lead the way in our traditional areas of expertise; managing the international radio-frequency spectrum and satellite orbit resources, setting the standards underpinning modern information and communication networks, helping spread equitable, sustainable and affordable access to information and communication technologies, and organizing events at a local, regional and global level that help promote the development and take-up of ICTs worldwide.

**Q: Do you feel IPv6 is relevant for the developing world – or is it only a developed world issue?**

**A:** IPv6 will take us to the so-called 'Internet of Things' – a world where machines and inanimate objects will actively interact with the network, without the need for human intervention.

Because ICTs are just as indispensable in the developing world as they are to developed economies, the issue is critical. IPv6 is clearly an important global issue. At ITU we continue support the proactive promotion of IPv6 as the new platform for innovation and business sustainability. It's clear that we'll all have to make the move – so we are encouraging those members in a position to do so to embrace this new model and begin the transition now.

**Q: As someone who has been involved in the setup of many telemedicine and tele-education schemes, do you feel more could be done in providing expertise to developing regions?**

**A:** It's certainly true that we need to continue to push these applications, which can deliver enormous benefits in regions where geography and cost constraints can limit traditional service delivery. I do not believe we will meet the Millennium Development Goals without the concerted deployment of ICTs. There'll be no education advances without e-education; no improvements in public health without e-health; and no 'good governance' without e-governance. This is why this year's

ITU Telecom World event features special Thematic Pavilions focusing on e-Health, on Green ICT, and on e-Education. We've developed these Pavilions in partnership with other leading development agencies, such as UNESCO, the World Health Organisation, and the World Meteorological Organization. We'll also have the Director-General of the World Intellectual Property Organization at the show to speak on technological innovation.

**Q: As you look back over your first term in office, what do you count as your key successes?**

**A:** I'm pleased to be able to say there have been many successes. At the internal level, ITU has greatly streamlined its working practices and has more fully embraced the advanced ICT management and online collaboration tools we actively promote to our members. We're also well on the way to going climate neutral and paperless by our target date of 2012.

More broadly, we're successfully engaging with the crucial issues affecting our planet and the evolving ICT landscape.

We've met with enormous support for our new ITU Connect events. Part of our 'Connect the World' initiative, the first event, ITU Connect Africa, raised an unprecedented US$ 55 billion in investment pledges. We're not talking here about aid commitments – we're talking about investment by private enterprise in markets where they are seeking to establish profit-making ventures. I believe the key to development is not hand-outs, but business. That said, government also clearly has a crucial role here in determining the parameters that allow private enterprise to thrive while protecting the needs of consumers in areas like pricing and access.

The launch of our Global Cybersecurity Agenda in 2007, and its first practical programme, the Child Online Protection initiative, last year, have also been major achievements.

There is a growing and evil scourge of cybercrime, and no nation is safe. In cyberspace, there are no national borders. That means that any country can unwittingly and unwillingly harbour cybercriminals without its knowledge – and with no real power to stop them. It also means that any country can face attack – even the most technologically advanced.

It's clear than an international framework is the only effective approach. To begin to tackle this problem, ITU set up a High Level Experts Group which included the top security experts from leading software and hardware developers, as well as key government decision makers.

In 2008 we signed an MoU to establish the first physical home of the GCA at IMPACT in Malaysia, and have already had commitments from over 40 nations to participate in this initiative. The new IMPACT facility comprises the world's most advanced early warning and response centre for cyberthreats. We'll be unveiling more news about this with IMPACT at ITU Telecom World.

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