



**THE RIGA DOCUMENT
on
"THE CITIES SOLIDARITY INITIATIVE"**

We,

Mayors and High Political Representatives, members of the Global Cities Dialogue, attending the Steering Committee Meeting in the city of Riga, Latvia, on the occasion of the Baltic IT&T Conference, on 4 April 2003,

CONSIDERING

the commitments made in the Bologna Statement, approved during the last GCD-GAM in Bologna, regarding the fight against the digital divide and in particular the part II "co-operation with the European Commission, the GBDe, TeleCities and other relevant Institutions" of the 2003-04 GCD Action Plan,

RECOGNISING

the efforts of the previous bilateral actions taken in order to help less-developed cities, and to support them with technological devices, as did Issy-les-Moulineaux with Bamako with the help of the European Commission and the support of the City of Angers, and Ronneby with the City of Slavsk in Kaliningrad,

AWARE of

the particular structure of the GCD network, and the huge organizational aspects in managing such initiative as a centralized action,

DECLARE to commit ourselves

- in renaming the North-South Solidarity Initiative into Cities Solidarity Initiative (CSI), given the worldwide coverage of this initiative,
- in agreeing and pursuing the purposes of the CSI, as defined in the attached strategic paper, e.g. to work officially and co-operate with European and international as well with local development NGOs as local points of reference, to support sustainability of the CSI,

- in involving governmental authorities to a greater extent, in order to help the reinforcement of the development capacities of the concerned regions and cities,
- in spreading the results of this initiative to the cities worldwide, with the help of the GCD-cities in the different continents as decentralized points of contact,

CONCLUDE that

the Riga Document will be approved in order to implement the structure of the CSI. The initial results of CSI will be officially presented during the General Assembly Meeting in the framework of the World Summit of Cities and Local Authorities on the Information Society (WSCLAIS), that will take place in Lyon on 5 December 2003.

Strategic approach and proposed modus operandi for the GCD-CSI

Introduction

The GCD officially commits itself in realizing the Cities Solidarity Initiative (CSI) as a concrete measure to fight against the digital divide, with the help of the observer members and other partners. The initiative is coordinated by the City of Cento; a CSI-Advisory Group composed of representatives of the GCD-Steering Committee, observer members and partners will assist Cento for implementing this action. At the operative level the work will be mainly done by the sherpas of the member cities belonging to the Advisory Group in co-operation with the relevant partners.

The setting up of the organizational structure will move along at the same pace with the strategic aspects. The modus operandi of putting this initiative into practice has to be defined within a time schedule as precised in 4.

Once the political commitment is achieved, the financial and logistical aspects have to be carefully examined taking into account that GCD does not have any funds for carrying out such kind of activities. A preliminary analysis of resources and investigation of suitable strategic procedures to implement the CSI has been realised. The present document presents the results of this initial internal evaluation.

Shared use of existing structures, organisations and expertise

The hardware is already available in the different "donor" cities, which are either member cities of the GCD, TeleCities or partner cities of the GBDe. In this context GCD will work very closely with GBDe. The main problem

that has to be solved, will concern the transport of computers and equipment towards the beneficiary cities.

The logistical aspects for offering hardware foresee a high estimated budget, which can be considerably reduced when using existing structures. This is the main argument for proposing a decentralised organisation that will involve existing and experienced institutions in the CSI. The decisive factor in favour of a decentralised approach is to ensure the sustainability of the initiative by implementing the best appropriate modus operandi.

A preliminary contact has been established to the following initiatives:

- the World Computer Exchange:
www.worldcomputerexchange.org
- Informatique et Solidarité (Informatics and Solidarity): This French association collects computers and equipments and provides the refurbished equipment for free to non-profit organizations operating in less developed countries.
www.iso.asso.fr
- the Swedish Government Agency for bilateral International Development Cooperation (SIDA) which already helped a similar project. www.sida.se/Sida/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=107
- the Computers For Schools (CFS) programme in Canada. The programme is a Federal government led initiative that gives Canadian students access to computer technology. Operating with various partnerships, CFS collects, repairs and refurbishes donated surplus computer equipment and distributes them free to the Canadian schools and libraries. They have been going for 9 years and they have probably reached the 400,000 computers target by Christmas 2002.
www.schoolnet.ca/cfs-ope

Decentralisation should also be envisaged when looking for external funding for CSI. Actually two potential sources of co-financing do exist, corresponding to the geographical affiliation of the beneficiary cities:

1. For Latin America: Applying for the EU-programme URB-AL II within the Thematic Network 13 "Towns and the Information Society", coordinated by the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen. The Deadline of submitting a project proposal is end of October 2003.
2. For Africa and Asia: Applying for co-financing within the framework of a EU-programme that helps operations in development countries (PVD), and supports in particular the aspect of co-financing with European Development NGOs. The next call for projects is planned for 2004 – maybe even earlier.

Especially for the last mentioned programme, it will be necessary to win NGOs as main partners and even better if they have already worked in this programme.

Next Steps

The next step to be done by the member cities of the GCD is to commit in involving Development NGOs in the CSI. Afterwards, adequate NGOs – NGOs located in Europe and NGOs located on the site of the beneficiary cities – have to be determined. The selection of NGOs has to be done simultaneously by all partners, here included the beneficiary cities because they are supposed to know the Development NGOs in their countries. Furthermore they have to work with them closely later on.

The selection of NGOs has to be done very carefully, based on the examination of their individual backgrounds and statutes. An agreement has to be signed between GCD and the NGOs, documenting the cooperativeness and the willingness to realise the joint projects.

In order to be able to start the concrete work on a well-founded basis, an overview on the state-of-the-art in Latin-American, African and Asian cities is required. Thus, it is considered as necessary to carry on the pre-analysis made by the Advisory Group as a small study within GCD. Once the study is completed (Mai/ June 2003), a list of suitable partners, prerequisites and requirements as well as an estimation of efforts will be provided.

A questionnaire for gathering information on the specific situation in Africa, Asia and Latin-America have to be elaborated. In this context it will be possible to create synergies with the work that will be done within the framework of the URB-AL II Network 13 "Towns and the Information Society". The Network 13 could provide the questionnaire elaborated for Latin-America and as well as the results of a study realised by one of its experts in Chile.

A CSI-mailing-list with all potential partners, NGOs and contacts related to the realisation of CSI will be set up in order to regularly inform these organisations about the progress and next steps of the initiative. The dissemination activity will help to foster international recognition and attract NGOs to support this initiative.

Once the members area of the GCD-website is set up, the creation of a CSI-discussion forum should be envisaged.

Time Schedule/ Milestones

- March – April 2003: Establishing contacts to potential partners, NGOs, etc, Analysing the state-of-the art of potential beneficiary cities with the help of a questionnaire
- Mai – June 2003: Setting up the consortia

- July - August 2003: Drafting a project proposal for the geographical axis Europe - Latin America that will be submitted within the URB-AL II programme, N13 "Towns and the Information Society"
- September/ October 2003: Elaboration and submission of the proposal (URB-AL II)
- End of 2003 - beginning of 2004: answering the call for projects within the programme EuropeAid: 'co-financing with European Development NGOs; operations in developing countries (PVD)'

Two phases

In order to start acting as soon as possible, the action could be realised in two separate phases: One related to the transfer of suitable software, the second phase related to the transfer of hardware. Not excluding the possibility of transferring hard- and software together, this solution could be envisaged for the following two reasons:

- Software is easily transferable and its transfer does not require long prearrangements or transport costs.
- Some free software-solutions are already available and could be provided to selected beneficiary cities very soon.

Example: The Regional Government of Extremadura, Spain, developed a Linux-based open-source software package including an operating system and software ranging from text editors to an Internet browser. (www.linex.org)

Extremadura is willing to provide the free software to other cities within the framework of the CSI. We recommend to start a peer-to-peer transfer between Extremadura and selected cities in Latin America, in order to gain first experiences. Extremadura could provide a support for the implementation and installation process and could initiate the cities in handling the software.

GCD as one of the major players in fighting against the digital divide

The proposed strategy is targeted on building up a solid and lasting platform for sustainable measures in fighting against the digital divide. The CSI should not be conceived as a punctual measure but as an umbrella initiative for ongoing activities in the field of digital inclusion between cities.

By turning the CSI into one pillar of the mission of GCD, GCD could assure its position as one of the main actors in fighting against the digital divide. As the GCD is actually looking for partners to support the CSI, GCD should become an inescapable contact point for interested partners in the near future.