Preface

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Animated discussion of the economic miracle heralded by information and communication technologies (ICTs) was ubiquitous in the late 1990s. Yet as the dust settles upon the era of the "new economy," and as the wilder claims regarding the resurgent power of new technologies die down, it is nevertheless clear that ICTs have become one of the key factors in all modern economies.

Policymakers and business leaders increasingly recognize the need to create an enabling environment to support the development and adoption of technologies across all sectors. The importance of Networked Readiness, at the regional and national levels, has gained prominence on the public policy agenda alongside the realization that the tools provided by ICTs can help countries fulfill their national potential and enable a better quality of life for their citizens.

This report highlights the prospects for growth in countries that have proven themselves ready to take up new technologies, and importantly, reveals the obstacles to Networked Readiness. Through in-depth analysis of how multiple factors such as access to enabling infrastructure, local content development, and human capacity-building contribute to Networked Readiness, the report can serve as a guide to policymakers and regulators.

The World Economic Forum itself has responded to this issue since January 2000, when the Global Digital Divide Initiative was launched at our annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland. The meeting gathered together top ICT, media, communications, and entertainment sector executives. These executives initiated the formation of a task force to look at how to transform into an opportunity for growth the so-called digital divide between developed countries that had embraced Networked Readiness, and those countries that potentially would lag behind.

Since its inception, the task force has engaged a uniquely global, multisectoral, and diverse community of stakeholders from business, government, and civil society who meet to explore creative ways to engage stakeholders worldwide in dialogue and action to address the challenge of bridging the global digital divide.

At the invitation of the government of Japan, in its then-capacity as President of the G-8, the task force submitted a statement in July 2000 at the Kyushu-Okinawa Summit meeting. In this statement, the task force outlined policy actions and initiatives that each stakeholder group could undertake to transform the global digital divide into a opportunity. Since then, the task force has continued to contribute to the work of the G-8 Dot Force and the United Nations ICT task force.

Since November 2000, the task force has been engaged in its implementation phase, with steering committees working on the key issues of education, content, connectivity, and strategies and policies needed to create an entrepreneurial environment. At a policy level, the task force works with regional policymakers to provide them with new perspectives; the October 2001, joint consultative workshop on Networked Readiness held with the Southern Africa Development Community, is one such example. At the grassroots level, task force member companies channel resources and support to projects that promote education, training, and new enterprise building.

The Global Digital Divide Initiative continues to be the product of fruitful collaboration between members of a broad community of businesses, governments, and civil society. I would, however, wish to thank especially the 2001 cochairs of the task force, Joao Roberto Marinho, Cochairman, Organizaçoes Globo, Brazil; Jean Marie Messier, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Vivendi Universal, France; and Maureen O'Neil, President, International Research and Development Centre, Canada for their time and commitment to the work of the task force. In addition, I would like to thank

the digital divide secretariat, Julianne Lee, Juliet Borton, and Julia Fisherman, for their continued hard work on the Global Digital Divide Initiative.

We extend our gratitude to all the committed business leaders that responded to our Survey. We would like to extend a special thank you to Geoffrey Kirkman, Managing Director of the Information Technologies Group at the Center for International Development at Harvard University, who has taken the lead role in creating this project, as well as his colleague, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, who also serves as the cochair of the Global Competitiveness Program. At the World Economic Forum, my appreciation goes to Dr. Peter K. Cornelius, who has been charged with heading the Global Competitiveness Program under which this Report is published. Finally, we extend very special thanks to our partner, the *info*Dev Program at the World Bank, led by Bruno Lanvin, Program Manager, for their support of this important study.