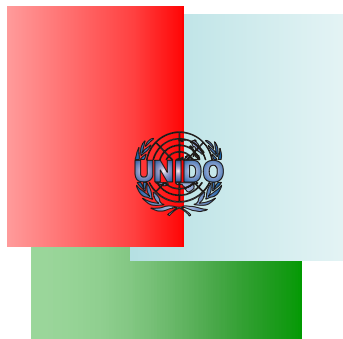


Business Information Networking

- A Tool to Sustainable Industrial Development -



Economy

Environment

Employment

Challenges of Industrial Development

Small and Medium Enterprises are the driving force in industrial development. They comprise more than 90% of all enterprises in the world and are on average providing 60 to 80% of total employment, thus help to contribute to Millennium Development Goals, in particular poverty eradication (MDG 1) and developing global partnerships (MDG 8). In today's information society, the competitiveness of SMEs largely depend on their having access to reliable and relevant business information to enhance productivity and facilitate market access.

However, in most developing countries, the availability of reliable information and access to information is limited. Moreover, SMEs need tailor-made information solutions, i.e. business information services that provide a specific solution to a specific business problem, not just a reference to a document or source of information. The existing information support infrastructure in developing countries is often unable to provide these information services by itself. Hence, there is a need to assist the developing countries in the establishing sustainable and dependable business information services.

UNIDO's Information Networking Programme

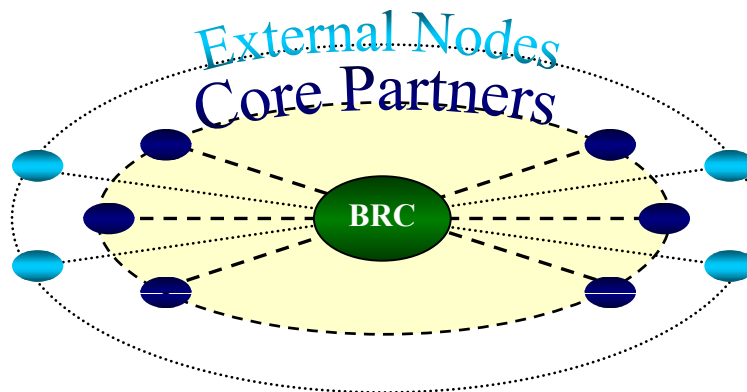
In order to respond to specific information needs of SMEs, the Business Information Services programme of UNIDO creates value added by bringing together information from different sources and transforming that information into business solutions.

Based on its global networking contacts, UNIDO has developed a methodology for establishing integrated industrial information networks that link relevant national and international information sources into a Business Resource Centres (BRC). There is a need to support the development of BRCs in developing countries. The key requirements for the capacity building support for business information solutions networking are *commercial sustainability, local ownership and public-private sector partnership, as well as synergy with other existing network initiatives.*

Partners in UNIDO Information Networking Projects

The BRC operates in a network of information nodes, known as the business information network, *BISnet*, which is conceived as a heterogeneous, decentralized and demand driven network. The building entities of the network are as follows:

- a. *The Focal Point* - the BRC linked with the nodes of the *BISnet*. Appropriate network architecture is necessary on the basis of the existing ICT infrastructure in the concerned country.
- b. *Core Partners* - institutions that are involved in the generation of industrial or market information.
- c. *External Nodes* - national and international information sources, i.e. institutions and international agencies in various countries dealing with industrial and market information.



BISnet – the BRC and its decentralized structure

Information, ICT¹ and e-business services

To support the sustainability of the BRC, related services have to be offered, such as ICT Training, and Enterprise Internet Solutions (EIS). Accordingly, the BRC will have three business units as profit centres, namely Information Services, ICT Training, and Enterprise Internet Solutions.

a. Information Services

Information brokering and research, technology transfer brokering, consultancy services. These services would be provided on demand basis and as regular publications, e.g. profile reports for exporters, reports on specific technology offers, industry reports (statistics, trends, new technologies, market opportunities, both local and international), etc;

b. ICT Support and Training Services

ICT management skills, ICT productivity tools, ICT for financial, business applications, including use of Open Source Software; Business Process Outsourcing (call centres, back office operations);

c. Enterprise Internet Solutions

EIS solutions using Web technology - Web strategy and site development; development of e-portals; enterprise integration into global value-chains and procurement networks, e-security and e-trust support, as well as business applications support.

How to work with UNIDO?

The information networking support projects are aimed at providing support to national SMEs to improve their productivity and competitiveness. UNIDO assists national stakeholders in establishing a structure for sustainable support in the new areas of the use of ICTs for SMEs.

UNIDO's support to implement business information networking starts with a fact-finding mission primarily to obtain relevant information and to ascertain the level of the local ICT infrastructure and the interest of the stakeholders. Based on the outcome, UNIDO defines an implementation strategy with the following phases:

- (1) SME gap analysis of information needs and ICT infrastructure,
- (2) Development of a suitable business model and related business plan,
- (3) Partnership building process with the stakeholders,
- (4) Establishment of the BRC.

Implementation of the BRC will be undertaken in synergy with other UNIDO and non-UNIDO technical cooperation projects and networking initiatives, as well as community telecentres.

Examples of Information Networking projects

The experience of the projects that have been undertaken by UNIDO for business information networking is different from one country to another. Although the core concept remained the same, a different approach is applied in each country to suit local conditions and utilize the existing SME support infrastructure.

¹ ICT – Information and Communications Technologies

Egypt – BISnet:

In cooperation with the Egyptian Social Fund for Development and its SME department SEDO, UNIDO has formulated a business model to establish Egypt-BISnet, a commercially operating SME business information network. The first phase of the project will include a hub in Cairo and three other regional centres.

Guatemala – MINECONet:

MINECONet is to establish a national industrial information network on the basis of a common pool of SME support information and value-added services. As a first step, an SME portal was established. In the next phase, MINECONet will be enlarged with the participation of several national partner institutions.

Uganda – UBIN:

The Uganda Business Information Network (UBIN) in Uganda is a private limited company with shareholders from public and private sectors. The company provides value added information services, ICT Training and Enterprise Internet Solution. The next phase will extend UBIN into rural districts of Uganda.

Sri Lanka – ITMIN:

The Industrial and Technology Market Information Network set up as an BRC in Sri Lanka, was one of the first initiatives of UNIDO to apply decentralised BISnet activities. ITMIN, in addition to providing information value added services, also provides training and Internet Services, including Enterprise Internet Solutions and Internet connectivity.

UNIDO discussion panel at WSIS

UNIDO will organize a panel discussion during the WSIS conference on 9 December 2003 in Room 17, Hall 4 of the PALEXPO building; from 16:00 to 18:00 h. Speakers from ongoing UNIDO projects have been invited to speak about their challenges and solutions. For further information on the event, see www.unido.org/wsisis. Cooperation proposals from other multilateral, bilateral organizations and NGOs are very much appreciated.

Further information

If you wish to receive more information on UNIDO please see www.unido.org, in particular www.unido.org/en/doc/18761, from where a more detailed paper on UNIDO's guidelines for information networking can be downloaded.

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