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IGF Nairobi 2011: Opening Address by Mr. S. Ramadorai (BASIS Chair)

Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen. I am honored to address you today as the Vice Chairman of Tata Consultancy Services, and the Chair of the International Chamber of Commerce's BASIS initiative, Business Action to Support the Information Society.

As we begin the 6th IGF here in Nairobi, I would like to start by thanking our hosts, the Government of Kenya, and the IGF Secretariat and the Multistakeholder Advisory Group for their enduring support of this important meeting.

Working on behalf of businesses worldwide, BASIS is a long-time supporter of the IGF. We believe there is no other forum that provides such a unique opportunity to exchange views and best practices on a wide variety of important policy issues. We all come to IGF 2011 in Kenya, united in a common belief - that the Internet is a true force for positive change.

We've seen how Internet access can transform lives, economies and industries. From improving literacy rates across under-served communities, to reaching doctors in remote countries with critical healthcare information; it has the potential to empower and improve the lives of billions of people and continues to be one of our most important global resources.

And in 2011 the opportunities have never been greater. Trends we've been talking about for some time have gathered pace. Social media has exploded, providing new opportunities to share information and do business. Adoption of Cloud services is increasing together with the promise of new efficiencies and the proliferation of mobile devices and smart-phones has made anytime, anywhere connectivity a reality.

Yet this new, fast-paced, connected era, brings a fresh set of policy challenges and we must continue to work together to make the right governance choices that help to develop the Internet in a way that doesn't diminish its open spirit.

My experience at Tata Consultancy Services has taught me that regulation for regulation's sake is not the answer. We need to work together to develop regulatory environments where better access to information is encouraged, the free flow of information is protected and innovation and entrepreneurship is enabled.

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Allow me to share a couple of examples from India where our government is focused on driving inclusive growth through Internet access.

Arogyashri ('healthcare' in Hindi), is a unique 'health insurance scheme' for families below the poverty line, initiated by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, in South India. The scheme addresses the need for hospitalization, and covers about 1000 life threatening diseases in an entirely cash-less mode.

Operating as the Arogyashri Healthcare Trust, the Government pays the premium for the beneficiaries, the insurance company takes the risk, and 440 empanelled Hospitals render the service.

A digital system monitors all 5,000 people employed in the program, and the extensive use of VOIP-based communications optimizes costs. All patient documents are downloadable and all hospitals have a scorecard.

The scheme's success has led to over nine hundred thousand surgeries, over 4 million people screened across 23,000 health camps and over 550 million USD (in rupees) paid out since April 2007.

The operating model is surprisingly simple but one which truly leverages the power of the Internet and ICTs in transforming the lives... and the future of rural poor.

My second example, DesiCrew, is a 'rural Business Process Outsourcing company (BPO)' working to set up service centres in the villages of Tamil Nadu. In addition to providing employment for rural women, the company has also given them computer and English language skills.

As part of an e-Governance smartcard project for the state of Rajasthan, DesiCrew was involved in opening bank accounts, providing health insurance, and disbursing a certain sum of money to all women in the state living below the poverty line. A large scale information gathering exercise was carried out involving the digitization of data, training of over 1,000 professionals, processing of 4.1 million insurance forms and coordinating 40 data entry and scanning centers.

Fair and effective internet governance approaches have been vital to making these kinds of initiatives possible and we must continue to facilitate this through the discussions we have at every IGF.

I'd like to sum up today by expressing my delight at the UN's decision to extend the 5 year mandate of the IGF. Together with the national and regional IGF initiatives, it is a unique opportunity for us to come together to share, learn and listen on an equal footing in a non-negotiating, non-decision-making environment.

And given that the theme of this year's forum is the '**Internet as a Catalyst for Change**,' I think it's particularly special that we're meeting here in Nairobi.

In Kenya, much focus has been placed on engaging with industry players to ensure affordable Internet access. The strategy is working and today there are 10.2 million Internet subscribers across the country¹.

It is hugely important that we secure the sustained involvement of more emerging country participants from all stakeholder groups to continue to accelerate Internet diversity, availability and affordability.

The last few years show us that the seemingly impossible can become reality. Let us all take inspiration from the DesiCrew worker in India, the aspiring horticulturist in Kenya and the ambitious laundry service owner in Cambodia in making this year's IGF the most successful yet.

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1,168 words shortened to 885

¹ Statistics from the Communication Commission of Kenya