

Preface

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Information and communication technologies (ICT) is increasingly moving to the core of national competitiveness strategies around the world, thanks to its revolutionary power as a critical enabler of growth, development, and modernization. Recent economic history has shown that, as developed countries approach the technological frontier, ICT is crucial for them to continue innovating in their processes and products and to maintain their competitive advantage. Equally importantly, ICT has proven instrumental for enabling developing and middle-income economies to leapfrog to higher stages of development and fostering economic and social transformation.

All over the world, ICT has empowered individuals with unprecedented access to information and knowledge, with important consequences in terms of providing education and access to markets, of doing business, and of social interactions, among others. Moreover, by increasing productivity and therefore economic growth in developing countries, ICT can play a formidable role in reducing poverty and improving living conditions and opportunities for the poor.

In these challenging times of global economic crisis, the extraordinary capacity of ICT to drive growth and innovation should not be overlooked, since it can play a critical role not only in facilitating countries' recovery but also in sustaining national competitiveness in the medium to long term. At the World Economic Forum, we are strong believers in the link between economic growth and ICT readiness, a link that should be further emphasized in the face of the current severe economic downturn and calls for budget cuts.

The Global Information Technology Report (GITR) series, produced by the Forum in partnership with INSEAD and published annually since 2001, has contributed to raising awareness of the importance of ICT diffusion for overall competitiveness. The broad methodological framework of the Networked Readiness Index (NRI), featured in the *Report* series, identifies the enabling factors that permit countries to fully benefit from ICT advances, stressing the key responsibility of all social actors—individuals, businesses, and governments. The NRI has proven a unique tool for policymakers and all relevant stakeholders, allowing them to follow the progress of their country over time and vis-à-vis relevant comparators, and providing a neutral and authoritative platform for public-private dialogue and for designing

national policies and strategies that aim toward enhanced networked readiness and competitiveness.

The Global Information Technology Report 2008–2009, the eighth edition in the series, presents the latest findings of the NRI, providing an updated picture of the state of networked readiness in the world. Under the general theme of mobility, the *Report* notably highlights the remarkable role of mobile telephony—possibly the most revolutionary ICT—in economic growth, and once again showcases success stories of countries able to leverage ICT for increased competitiveness.

Continuing our effort to expand the coverage of the *Report*, a record number of 134 economies, accounting for over 98 percent of the world's GDP, has been included this year. Also featured in the *Report* is a comprehensive data section containing detailed profiles for each economy covered and data tables with global rankings for nearly 70 indicators. A number of essays and case studies on mobility and best practices in networked readiness complement the *Report*.

We would like to express our gratitude to the respected academics and industry experts who contributed outstanding chapters to this *Report*, casting light on important aspects of mobility and ICT and highlighting best policies and practices in ICT diffusion and leverage. We especially wish to thank the editors of the *Report*, Soumitra Dutta at INSEAD and Irene Mia at the World Economic Forum, for their leadership and long-lasting dedication to the project. Appreciation also goes to Fiona Paua, who heads the Strategic Insight Teams, and the other members of the Global Competitiveness Network: Jennifer Blanke, Ciara Browne, Agustina Ciocia, Margareta Drzeniek Hanouz, Thierry Geiger, Pearl Samandari, and Eva Trujillo Herrera. Last but not least, we would like to convey our sincere gratitude to our network of 150 Partner Institutes around the world and to all the business executives who participated in our Executive Opinion Survey, without whose valuable input and support the production of this *Report* would not have been possible.