

## Preface

On behalf of the Organizing Committee, it is our great pleasure to introduce this volume of contributions to the second Open Round Table on "Developing Countries Access to Scientific Knowledge: Quantifying the Digital Divide" held 23-24 October 2003 at the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste, Italy.

For four decades, the ICTP has paid special attention to keep scientists in developing countries well informed on what goes on at the frontiers of science, knowing very well, that this is an essential ingredient in keeping development going. This has been done using different modes, workshops, conferences, visits of scientists to the Centre, where its well furnished library, is one of the main attractions.

Nowadays, with the advent of Internet and fast communications, the need to keep up to date is more urgent, then, it was nothing but its duty to think of a way to give access to online scientific literature to scientists working in the most remote areas, with very bad connectivity, and minimal resources. The Centre has a world-wide reputation for its significant contributions to the internationalization of science, and today its mandate has become even more relevant.

The ICTP's visionary programs have always emphasized the importance of information retrieval systems on the Internet, including open access archives and databases as well as public access catalogs. Based on open source technologies and the use of digital (wireless) communication tools, the ICTP has implemented effective and indeed unprecedented programs to transfer knowledge to development countries in the Southern hemisphere. The importance of these tools to help reduce scientific isolation and to bridge the digital divide has long been recognized by the ICTP.

Following these principles, software prototypes have been built in house, such as on-line scientific tools to further enhance electronic collaboration and to support the use of web navigation and database search by e-mail. The pioneer free electronic Journals Delivery Service (eJDS), launched at the beginning of 2002, aimed at providing all the necessary links so that individual scientists in developing countries could have access to the most prestigious journals in physics and mathematics, is another of the unique ICTP initiatives.

In October 2002 a Round Table on "Developing Country Access to On-line Scientific Publishing: Sustainable Alternatives" was organized, where publishers, librarians, scientists gathered together to share similar experiences. It was an exciting event where the inventiveness and solidarity of people from different backgrounds was set to effectively bridge the digital divide. A set of recommendations. Recommendations of Trieste to Bridge the Digital Divide were written and collaborations started.

Today, a year has passed and we meet again to analyze what has been accomplished. We have also invited new people, whom we know have made efforts in the same

direction, with different techniques, so that the individual efforts come afloat in order to collectively achieve our goals.

Once again we intend to analyze, share experiences, promote ideas, and discuss those issues which will enhance our understanding and assist us in quantifying the digital divide. Our efforts focus on the analysis of differences in network performance for developed and developing countries, effective strategic alternatives, innovative technological tools, and e-contents and licensing issues.

We thank all the authors who contributed to this volume. We sincerely hope it will provide a useful reference point and become a precursor for improved ways to help further ongoing efforts to bridge the digital divide.

We are also grateful to the International Advisory Committee: Ms Minella Alarcon (UNESCO), Prof. R. Les Cottrell (SLAC), Prof Harvey B Newman (Caltech) and Ms Carol Priestley (INASP) for their invaluable collaboration. The second Open Round Table was co-sponsored by the Internet End-to-end Performance Measurement (IEPM) project at SLAC.

Last but not least, we were fortunate to have Ms Dilys Grilli, who assisted in the preparation of these Proceedings and Mr Carlo Fonda for the cover design and the technical help to put the Round Table live in the Internet.

In the name of the Director of the Centre, Professor K.R. Sreenivasan and ourselves we welcome you to this meeting.

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