Ironically, the sector that was expected to define and lead the global economy into the new growth era of the new millennium would be the first casualty of a global economic slowdown and a diminishing capitalization of new products and ideas at the very beginning of that millennium. This contraction in the information technology sector in 2001 may have created further doubts in the minds of those who are unable to conceptualize the relationship among the rapid development and diffusion of IT, nurturing and interlinking knowledge cells into knowledge communities, and the empowerment of communities in the traditional non-industrialized economies.

However, under ideal circumstances, increasing access to information would enable groups to generate the knowledge that is critical in the transition of individuals, households, businesses, communities, and other levels of human and economic organizations into the global digital and networked economy. Hence, the myriad of connectivity initiatives around the world, which relate to all types of economies. In the advanced economies, these initiatives include the National Information Initiative (U.S.), Smart Communities (California), Singapore One, Connecting Canadians, Smart Capital (Ottawa, Canada), Digital Cities (Europe), Bayern On-Line (Germany), Ennis Information Age Town (Ireland), European Digital Cities, Telematique (France), and other programs in cities such as Stockholm, Seattle, Sacramento, and San Diego among others (Eger, 2001). Connectivity programs in emerging economies include Malaysia’s Multimedia SuperCorridor, Hong Kong’s Cyberport, and Indonesia’s Cybercity. Other transition economies and developing countries are also engaged in designing local connectivity programs,
with the support of their development partners in the donor community, foundations, businesses, and special initiatives.

Local and global investments and activities related to bridging the digital divide between the industrialized and non-industrialized worlds have raised the information and telecommunications capacity of many non-industrialized countries to at least a minimal level, despite the known digital divide. A Nielsen//NetRatings study of individuals in 23 countries in April 2001 indicated that the global population of Internet users had climbed to 390 million, and the bulk of Internet page readers may no longer be located in the industrialized economies alone. The Asia-Pacific region, led by South Korea, had become one of the zones of most avid surfers (CNN, 2001, asia.internet.ap/index.html); regional efforts such as the e-ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) Initiative are attempting to facilitate the transition of these communities into the global knowledge economy.

Latin America and Africa are also making inroads onto the information superhighway: all 54 African countries are now online, and connectivity emphasis is beginning to shift from urban centres to rural areas in some countries (Jensen, 2001). In some African countries, telecommunications operators are required to set up special area codes for ISPs to make all calls to the Internet become ‘local calls,’ and to enable networks with national coverage at a reduced cost for rural areas. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) is spearheading the Africa regional connectivity programs through the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) and the National Information and Communications Infrastructure (NICI) initiative.

Several bilateral and multilateral frameworks and programs are also providing developing country institutions with the tools and means to participate in the sharing and application of global knowledge, but reference to any network that the author may be affiliated with is not an attempt to bias the reader toward the initiatives. The Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), for example, is an informal partnership of public, private, and not-for-profit organizations that are committed to sharing information, experiences, and resources to promote access to, and effective use of, knowledge and information as tools of sustainable and equitable development. The Global Knowledge Partnership emerged from the cooperation of several organizations that sponsored one of the first conferences to consider global knowledge sharing for development through the Global Knowledge 97 conference: the GK97 conference, which was dubbed “Knowledge for Development in the Information Age,” convened in Toronto, Canada, in June 1997. The World Bank also initiated and continues to support connectivity for several knowledge sharing programs, including: the Information for Development (infoDev) program, which funds connectivity programs across the developing world; the Development Gateway Foundation (DGF) that is expected to develop a database containing more than
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