

Figure 2: ICT and the Sustainable Development Goals



The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals and related 169 targets agreed in September 2015 seek to complete the objectives initiated under the Millennium Development Goals. "They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. The Goals and targets will stimulate action over the next fifteen years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership."<sup>1</sup>

"ICTs can be an engine for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. They can power this global undertaking."<sup>2</sup>

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, December 2015

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, 2015a; <sup>2</sup> United Nations, 2015b  
Source: UN; World Economic Forum

and emerging markets. Within the Global Challenge initiative on the Future of the Internet, the Forum is addressing these problems in other pillars, including initiatives on cybercrime and security, internet governance and the human implications of digital media.<sup>11</sup>

#### The Barriers to Global Adoption and Use

After years of rapid increases, the growth in the number of internet users is slowing. The UN Broadband Commission noted recently that "growth in global mobile cellular subscriptions and growth in internet usage have slowed sharply. We have reached a transition point in the growth of the internet."<sup>12</sup> The expected milestone of 4 billion internet users worldwide is unlikely to be reached before 2020, and internet user penetration in the developing world will probably not achieve the 50% target before 2020.

The barriers to greater internet use fall into four categories: infrastructure; affordability; skills, awareness and cultural acceptance; and local adoption and use, which is often due to a lack of local content. (Research shows that in some large markets, such as India and Brazil, skills, awareness, cultural acceptance and availability of local content are actually the greatest barriers to more widespread usage after lack of infrastructure. However, since infrastructure and affordability are closely connected, they are discussed here first.) To facilitate the dialogue, this White Paper draws on a framework from the Forum's annual Networked Readiness Index (Figure 3). This framework serves as a comprehensive overview of the topics and issues that need to be considered and addressed when discussing internet access and adoption. It covers the underlying political and business environment that can help or hinder initiatives to encourage adoption and use, and considers other social and economic factors. This White Paper's structure is, at its core, a dialogue on infrastructure, affordability, skills and digital content.

Figure 3: Framework based on the Forum's Networked Readiness Index

