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RECOMMENDATIONS OF the Round Table held in TRIESTE
to help bridge the digital divide

A multidisciplinary group of international experts gathered for an open round table on "*Developing Country Access to On-line Scientific Publishing: Sustainable Alternatives*" during 4 - 5 October 2002 at the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy. The meeting was sponsored by: the Abdus Salam ICTP, ICSU, IUPAP, UNESCO, TWAS and WIF.

It grew from a need to bring together all interested parties to analyse concrete strategic alternatives for supporting scientists working in remote areas and having low-bandwidth, or suffering expensive access to on-line database services and the Internet. They shared experiences, promoted ideas and discussed innovative technological tools, the digital divide and licensing issues.

The participants of the round table developed this public set of recommendations to provide guidance and make suggestions to support concrete and sustainable alternatives to help bridge the digital divide and thus facilitate, in particular, developing countries access to on-line scientific publishing. (*)

THE ROUND TABLE

Working sessions were convened to discuss concrete, sustainable alternatives and initiatives that can help bridge the digital divide as much as possible until such time that

the understanding and actions of the rich countries towards the very poor with respect to access in a interconnected world improves. A lot of emphasis was put on the problem of convincing content providers of the small cost of doing effective philanthropy.

The main topics discussed include:

- Web to e-mail access;
- Real time monitoring of connectivity of research and educational institutions in the least developed countries;
- Local solutions on networking, Internet infrastructure (digital divide);
- Focused initiatives from publishers and special license issues;
- World-wide initiatives from NGO's, or content providers;
- Optimization/Awareness of resources and reviewing available technologies.

CONSENSUS STATEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES

The following consensus was reached, by those present at the open round table. This declaration reflects the views of participants to the open round table and does not necessarily reflect the views of their respective institutions. It made the following recommendations for action:

- To encourage Web to e-mail access (*e.g.*, via the open source software `www4mail`).
- To create a new special (low-cost) license in which Publishers offer *Off-line Web to e-mail* access to current scholarly literature.
- To invite more Scientific Publishing Companies to participate in the eJDS program via Web for e-mail of the ICTP, Trieste. (`www.ejds.org` or `www.ictp.trieste.it/ejournals`).
- To increase the critical mass of skilled people in ICT by training on Communication, Networking, Web enabling Technologies and the adaptation of technology to local needs.

- To devote resources to monitor in real time the connectivity of research and educational institutions in developing countries and to encourage (and devote resources to) the development of the connectivity.
- To provide low cost or free access to scholarly literature for and by developing countries where reasonable Internet bandwidth is available and for developing countries where publishers revenue is not significantly impacted.
- To note the obligation of well-off institutions to help those less fortunate, both in developing and developed countries, to achieve access to scholarly literature.
- To continue to provide capacity building and share methodologies to ensure that content from developing countries has a presence on the Web.
- To publicize all access alternatives openly since the general public, the scientific community and/or policy makers are unaware of them.
- To encourage and enable the uploading, downloading and sharing of publications from developing countries.

Most of those in attendance to the open round table agreed that a failure to confront these issues will have major implications for scientific research carried out in developing countries.

The benefits of implementing these strategies can be substantial if a concerted effort is undertaken to deliver this consensus statement to the public, key decision makers, and the media, creating a demand for better use of the Internet by providing very useful information and resources.

It was further proposed that a review of progress in implementing the recommendations should be undertaken.

Trieste, Italy - 5 October 2002

(*) This document is available at www.ictp.trieste.it/ejournals/meeting2002