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# Preface

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Information and communication technologies (ICT) has played a central role in fostering innovation and development of societies and economies. Not only has ICT increased productivity significantly in a variety of ways and therefore driven sustainable growth, but it has also provided people all over the world with better opportunities to improve their life conditions and their businesses. The Internet has brought about a revolution in businesses, education provision, and ways of interacting on a global scale, by offering each one of us, in the developed and developing world, unprecedented access to information and knowledge. In addition, especially through the Web 2.0 technologies, it has made the world smaller, facilitating the development of virtual communities and social networks, and nurturing information and experience sharing among individuals separated by geography.

The advances enabled by telecommunications are just as impressive, with mobile telephony providing small businesses and farmers in remote communities with access to new markets and real-time information on commodities prices, or creating new forms of entrepreneurship among the poor, as in case of the Grameen phones in Bangladesh. Further, mobile telephony has radically changed communication patterns among individuals more generally, be they busy executives conducting business over the BlackBerry on their way to the airport, or teenagers exchanging SMS messages.

The extraordinary power of ICT to enable growth, reduce poverty, and improve citizens' lives has become increasingly clear to policymakers and civil society alike, and ICT promotion has gradually found a more privileged place in national competitiveness strategies and policy agendas. The example of countries such as Singapore, Estonia, and Israel has shown how ICT can be the enabler of a competitive transformation of the economy, allowing countries to leapfrog to more advanced stages of development as well as production and export structures.

At the World Economic Forum, we have long understood the importance of innovation and ICT for national competitiveness and have contributed, over the years, to raising public awareness on the subject through our research and activities, especially with the *Global Information Technology Report* (GITR) series, in partnership with INSEAD. The GITR series, published annually since 2001, lays out a broad framework—the Networked Readiness Index (NRI)—identifying the enabling factors

for countries to leverage ICT developments, with a particular focus on the role of the three main social actors: individuals, businesses, and governments. The NRI provides a unique benchmarking instrument for economies to monitor their progress over time and vis-à-vis relevant comparators, and has turned into an authoritative platform for policymakers, business leaders, and other relevant stakeholders to discuss and elaborate national roadmaps toward increased networked readiness and competitiveness.

*The Global Information Technology Report 2007–2008*, the seventh in the series, includes the latest findings of our research, providing once again a comprehensive networked readiness snapshot of the world. In line with our continuing effort to expand the coverage of the *Report*, a record number of 127 economies has been assessed this year, accounting for more than 95 percent of the world's GDP. Also featured in the *Report* is an extensive section of data tables with global rankings covering nearly 70 indicators, together with a number of essays and case studies on notable trends and issues in networked readiness, and on national ICT development stories of particular interest.

We would like to express our gratitude to the eminent academics and practitioners who contributed insightful papers to this *Report*, casting light on important ICT developments and showcasing best practices and policies in ICT diffusion. We especially wish to thank the editors of the *Report*, Soumitra Dutta at INSEAD and Irene Mia at the World Economic Forum, for their energy and long-lasting dedication to the project. Appreciation also goes to Fiona Paua, who heads the Strategic Insights 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 commend our network of 142 Partner Institutes worldwide, without whose enthusiasm and hard work the annual administration of the Executive Opinion Survey and this *Report* would not be possible.