

# HUMAN WEB

WORKING TO CONNECT HUMANKIND

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## INTRODUCTION

This book is a reflection of my personal beliefs; it will leave you in no doubt as to where I stand. It is written for leaders from all around the world, in the sphere of business and of politics. I want to share with them my thoughts on a key way to improve our day to day lives: stepping up the pace of Internet access.

Too few people are aware of what is a striking figure. In 2017, around **52 % of the global population – 3.9 billion individuals – were without Internet access.**<sup>1</sup>

It is because I wanted to make the world aware of this state of affairs that I decided to write this text. It is for me more akin to a manifesto.

**This figure of 52 % should serve as a catalyst for a debate and a global mobilization.**

Lack of access is not just simply about being unable to access the Internet. There is a growing divide. Some people run the risk of becoming increasingly marginalized when it comes for instance to education, health, the economy, employment, and democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> According to figures from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).



Internet access is undoubtedly a major issue in the global North where the digital divide is a reality. Sixteen percent of the French population has no Internet access. Ten years ago, twice as many people found themselves in this situation. The figures are 12% for the United States, 38% for Italy and 35% for Argentina. Digital exclusion makes people feel neglected, left behind. These feelings, in turn, have considerable economic, social and political consequences.

But let us look beyond the concerns of the wealthiest countries. Internet access represents a serious issue for the global South. Although the number of people online globally has more than trebled since 2005, it is the affluent, the skilled and the influential who are benefiting from rapid digital expansion. They are best placed to get the full benefits of new technologies. Meanwhile, four billion people are being left behind.

Connecting the majority of the world's population to the Internet would significantly boost development. It would lead to improvements in health, literacy and levels of education. It would stimulate the economy and result in a better alignment between supply and demand in the labor market. For an African farmer, accessing the Internet is not just about going online. It means knowing the price at which rice is being traded, tracking information about rainfall or endemic plant diseases, and finding out when is the best time to sow crops.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Providing Internet access to the entire world: Looking beyond the Western experience.

The role of the Internet in developing countries should not be envisioned as the mere replication of what has taken place in the West. In developing countries, it is a matter of doing something about the fact there aren't many means of communication – in some cases there's even a complete lack of them. This is why the Internet should be viewed above all as a basic instrument of communication. It can be used as a lever for individual, educational, economic, social and political development. It is a tool that can help address deficits in the spheres of transport, health, logistics, communications and information infrastructures.

All around the world, in Asia, in Latin America, in Africa, people are reinventing Internet usage in a form that is adapted to their own needs. Innovative and determined local actors are taking initiatives. They are developing ground-breaking services, applications and content that meet the needs of the economic and social players and the people of their region as a whole.

The Internet gives each person the opportunity to take control of their own fate. Let's make this technological tool available everywhere, so that everyone can develop their potential, and ultimately have greater autonomy and more control over their own lives.

## 2. Digital access as an accelerator of development

Yes, digital technology is the solution of the future to bring about development in countries that are without natural resources or banking services and which have to cope with exponential demographic growth.

We need to be ready for the population explosion that is on its way. By 2050, a quarter of the world population will be African and 40% of the world's children under the age of five will live on the African Continent. The challenge of development is, therefore, a major one. The Internet can be part of the solution.

Digital technologies facilitate the flow of information, create opportunities for the poor and the middle classes, transform the business world, the world of work and the world of public administration. The cost of lost opportunities is enormous. What's more, if the wealthy, the skilled and the influential people of the world are almost the only ones to benefit from the rapid expansion of the digital sphere and make the most of it, global inequality will remain on the rise.

Hence the need to connect the world. This view is the product of years of working in the field. In Africa in particular, I have been able to see the impact of Internet access on development issues, through the work of the Orange Foundation in several African countries and projects such as Open Data in Côte d'Ivoire.

3. How can we do this? With actions, not words

We're all tired of hearing calls for global interventions. How about actually doing something?

One way of addressing the connection divide would be to form a group of determined world leaders who would work together with a "non-profit" ethos. This group, which would be both a political and an economic instrument, would also be a proposal-generating body, a lobbying organization and a means of promoting fundraising.

Connecting up the planet will require mobilization by not just private operators, politicians and states, but also international bodies such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the Organisation of African Unity.

This group's mission will be both to alert world opinion to a major issue and to prompt decision-makers to take action.

Connection to the Internet can change everything. Access represents the first building block in the fight against the digital divide. You can change the world by getting people online. In fact, the Internet can save the world.

Connecting all of humankind to the Internet would lead to rapid and overwhelmingly positive systemic effects.

The collective benefit to humanity of enabling several billion people to use the web and of disseminating data would be well worth the investment required to achieve it.

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## CHAPTER 1

### One human in two is without Internet access

There is simply no point in discussing the future of the economy, or indeed of humanity, without acknowledging a basic fact: half of the global population has no Internet access.

There is not enough awareness of this connectivity divide which is a fundamental issue in the age of the intangible economy.

As economic globalization gathers pace, the industrialized countries have entered a new era. Access to information and the dissemination of knowledge are at the heart of it. In tomorrow's world, research and innovation will take on increasingly prominent and key roles.

We can't stand by and allow the inhabitants of developing countries to remain on the margins of this new world because of an ICT deficit. In a new, more intangible economy, the challenge of development lies in the capacity of the different players to share and to organize the flow of "aggregated" data. And that's dependent upon Internet access.

The large-scale dissemination of new information and communication technologies and the spread of the Internet in particular will be of vital importance to the future of developing countries. This issue must be high priority.

If the existing digital divide isn't bridged, developing countries would find themselves even more isolated from existing economic circuits. Their prospects for growth would once more be heavily compromised.

Of course, taking a global perspective on these divides does not mean we shouldn't pay attention to other divides, of a social and culture nature, that are in evidence in developed economies. They should also be dealt with.

### A world of glaring inequalities

At the end of the 20th Century, the world went into fast forward mode. It seemed to go without saying that everyone was going to be able to access the Internet – this new means of communication that would transform the lives of individuals and be a factor of innovation, productivity and competitiveness for businesses. The initial hopes however came to nothing. The reality of the world of 2018 is one of non-existent, inadequate or excessively expensive networks. Sure, the Internet exists right across the world. But it's not part of everybody's world.

The figures paint a stark picture of a global divide.

In 2017, the world was populated by 7.476 billion inhabitants, 3.773 billion of whom (in other words 50% of the population) were Internet users.<sup>2</sup> Thirty-seven percent use social networking sites, 66% use a cell phone, and 34% access social networking sites using their phone. The number of Internet users is constantly growing (2017 figures show a 10% increase on 2016). Global take-up is uneven though. Twenty-nine percent of people in Africa go online. It's 33% in South Asia, 48% in Central Asia, 53% in South East Asia, 57% in the Far East, 60% in the Middle East, 66% in South America, 67% in Eastern Europe, 84% in Western Europe, and 88% in North America.

France's figure is above average: 88% of the population is connected. The United Arab Emirates have the highest rate (99%), ahead of Iceland (98%) and Norway (97%). There are also considerable differences in terms of connection speeds: the average around the world is 6.3 Mbps, compared to 9.7 Mbps in France and 26.3 Mbps in South Korea.

People also access the Internet differently from one country to the next. Worldwide, 50% of web traffic is by means of cell phone, 45% by computer and 5% by tablet. In many parts of the world, Internet users choose their cell phone over a computer, as is the case in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria for example (81% cell phone traffic). It's the opposite in countries like Russia (16%). In France, more than two thirds of Internet browsing takes place on computers and a quarter on cell phones, with the remainder being accounted for by tablets.

The list of the 10 most-visited sites in the world is also revealing when it comes to understanding variations in Internet

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<sup>2</sup> We are social, "Digital in 2017 Global Overview" (<https://wearesocial.com/fr/blog/2017/01/digital-social-mobile-les-chiffres-2017>).



access: Google.com, YouTube, Facebook, and Baidu take up the first four places. They are followed by Wikipedia, Yahoo, Google.co.in (the Indian version of Google), Amazon, QQ (China's number one messaging service), and finally Google.co.jp (Google for Japan).<sup>3</sup> In France, if you look for example at the month of October, the top ten sites for unique visitor numbers in order of popularity were: Google, Facebook, Microsoft, YouTube, Orange, Leboncoin, Wikipedia, Skype, PagesJaunes [YellowPages] and Amazon.<sup>4</sup>

The figures are just staggering when it comes to usage. On the Internet, every minute, 7 million snaps are shared on Snapchat, 350,000 tweets are posted, 216 million photos are liked on Facebook and 2.4 million on Instagram, 110,000 calls are made using Skype, 830,000 files uploaded on Dropbox and 400 hours of videos uploaded on Youtube.

But all of this is the work of just half of the world's population.

The Internet is a vast universe, a window on the world, a global network, as the phrase World Wide Web implies. But in fact, it is hardly universal. It's a window on the world that only one human in two gets to look through. It's a whole universe to which only half of the population has access. We should really be talking about a semi-global network or a semi-worldwide web...

You often hear people say that this infrastructure lag could represent an opportunity. The "advantages of backwardness"

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1. <sup>3</sup> Source: Alexa, "The top 500 sites on the web" (<http://www.alexa.com/top-sites>).

2. <sup>4</sup> Source: Médiamétrie (<http://www.blogdumoderateur.com/top-50-sites-desktop-france-octobre-2016/>).