The real digital divide essay sample

Encouraging the spread of mobile phones is the most sensible and effective response to the digital divide It was an idea born in those far-off days of the internet bubble: the worry that as people in the rich world embraced new computing and communications technologies, people in the poor world would be left stranded on the wrong side of a " digital divide". Five years after the technology bubble burst, many ideas from the time – that " eyeballs" matter more than profits or that internet traffic was doubling every 100 days – have been sensibly shelved. But the idea of the digital divide persist. On March 14th, after years of debate, the United Nations will launch a " Digital Solidarity Fund" to finance projects that address " the uneven distribution and use of new information and communication technologies" and " enable excluded people and countries to enter the new era of the information society". Yet the debate over the digital divide is founded on a myth – that plugging poor countries into the internet will help them to become rich rapidly. The lure of magic

This is highly unlikely, because the digital divide is not a problem in itself, but a symptom of deeper, more important divides: of income, development and literacy. Fewer people in poor countries than in rich ones own computers and have access to the internet simply because they are too poor, are illiterate, or have other more pressing concerns, such as food, health care and security. So even if it were possible to wave a magic wand and cause a computer to appear in every household on earth, it would not achieve very much: a computer is not useful if you have no food or electricity and cannot read.

Yet such wand-waving – through the construction of specific local infrastructure projects such as rural telecentres – is just the sort of thing for which the UN´s new fund is intended. How the fund will be financed and managed will be discussed at a meeting in September. One popular proposal is that technology firms operating in poor countries be encouraged to donate 1% of their profits to the fund, in return for which they will be able to display a " Digital Solidarity" logo. (Anyone worried about corrupt officials creaming off money will be heartened to hear that a system of inspections has been proposed.)