As Chairman of Intel, I am fortunate in being able to travel to many countries each year. Wherever I go, I ask people to tell me what is important in their lives. When speaking with leaders in developing nations, our discussion inevitably turns to how they are trying to raise the standard of living in their countries. I hear the same priorities everywhere: education, healthcare, economic development and governance. And while these are the common challenges, the question is how to solve them and make changes happen. However, I don’t need to travel very far to realize that societal challenges can live next door. In 2002, about 10% of the world’s population was 60 years of age or older. By 2050, a percentage that will have more than doubled, to 21%, or nearly 2 billion people. Who will take care of all these people? Living independently with quality for as long as we can, should be our goal as a society.

Being an engineer, I believe you can solve these problems through the use of technology as a tool. Information and communications technology (ICT) is the foundation of modern growth economies, the backbone for information sharing (medical, social services, educational), and the catalyst that breaks the often self-defeating relationship between geography and destiny, condition and age. Second only to the basic necessities of food, electricity, and clean water, ICT is the next critical investment required for sustained economic development and an inclusive society.

Over the years, I have also been able to compare the strategies that dozens of countries are using to expand and capitalize on the role of technology to advance development and make the benefits of technology available to more people. In doing this work, I have realized that no single entity – private or public – can succeed alone. Instead, this responsibility must be shared by the public and private sectors. The public sector brings the ability to fashion public policy in ways that expand technology infrastructure, enlist multiple stakeholders, and encourage additional investment. The private sector brings the ability to fashion public policy in ways that expand technology infrastructure, enlist multiple stakeholders, and encourage additional investment. The private sector brings discipline and expertise that foster a bottom-line environment; the private sector can make those qualities, as well as its financial resources, available to partnerships. For our part, corporations have a duty to look beyond the next quarter’s earnings and invest in the technology, people and ideas that will create an environment for change for those who need the most.

The most successful public-private partnerships result in local economic value achieved through a business
infrastructure that facilitates ongoing and growing access to these benefits

In any endeavour, self sustainability should be the motto. Over many programmes and years of donating time, energy and money, we’ve seen that the most successful projects end when a local business infrastructure is actively and successfully engaged. One way to promote further development is to address income-generation opportunities. Recently I have announced a joint business venture between Intel and the Grameen Bank, founded by Nobel Prize winner Dr. Muhammad Yunus, aiming to bring about self-sustaining solutions based on ICT to help empower the world’s impoverished citizens. The new company will use a private sector-based approach to entice entrepreneurship opportunities that may include remote villagers receiving medical attention through Internet connectivity and citizens in rural communities being able to order medicine locally instead of having to walk 10 miles to a hospital. Many times, larger achievements are built from a series of small and local initiatives, and creativeness in articulating benefits for those involved, are a key recipe for success. Look at the example of how the city of Rome is supporting social inclusion of their senior population while promoting IT literacy, where students act as tutors for senior citizens using the IT lab of the city’s schools. And while under supervision of their school teacher they get credits for every completed training programme.

If companies and governments can co-operate in applying what we are all learning, we can improve the lives of much of the world’s population, unleash their spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation, and ultimately help them compete in a global economy that increasingly depends on information. If we fail, the gap between the haves and have-nots will widen, increasing the potential for further isolation, desperation and instability in countries and groups of our population that deserve a better fate.