This toolkit arose from the need to provide a recipe book or a blueprint for the pilot schools of the UNESCO project to establish or strengthen schoolnets in Southeast Asia at the national and sub-regional levels. The project entitled, “Strengthening Use of ICTs in Schools and Schoolnet in Southeast Asian Countries”, funded by the Japanese Funds in Trust and the ASEAN Foundation, is aimed at: a) exploring and demonstrating how ICT can be used in schools to improve the quality of education and better prepare youth for the demands of the Knowledge Society; b) testing innovative models of ICT use in schools and in other places of learning; and c) improving connectivity and access to the wealth of educational resources through the establishment of a SchoolNets in Southeast Asia. It will establish or strengthen national schoolnet in eight countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam) as well as connect them to a sub-regional schoolnet hub.

In Asia and the Pacific, a number of countries that includes Australia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand, have established national schoolnets. Experts from several of these countries were commissioned to document their experiences in school networking. The cornucopia of experiences, tested strategies, best practices, and lessons learned arising from these case studies provide information which can be translated into a handy and practical set of do’s and don’ts useful to those about to embark on a similar initiative or in the process of upgrading their existing SchoolNets. The UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and the Commonwealth of Learning have seized this opportunity of turning these experiences and lessons learned into do-able and practical toolkit for establishing viable SchoolNets. This toolkit is meant for countries at various stages of development. Regardless of the stage of development, all will benefit from the toolkit as it offers guidelines tailor-made for those in different stages with different needs.

This toolkit is the first of its kind and a trailblazer not only in Asia and the Pacific but also throughout the world. It is a convergence of all that is good in school networking. SchoolNets have accelerated technology-based modernization of the education systems and schools. They have helped address the digital divide by mobilizing the telecommunication and IT sector to reduce telecommunications costs and offer free Internet connections through various arrangements. This has led in expanding the number of schools which can make telephone calls and connect to Internet; lowering student-computer and teacher-computer ratios; and enhancing the accessibility of teachers and students to computers through more open access areas and local- area and wide-area networking. Schoolnets have also networked educators and communities that otherwise have neither the tools nor the time and money to get together to connect for dynamic partnerships. They have therefore strengthened skills in collaborating and working in teams through their various telecollaboration activities and projects both at the national and global levels.
More information about the toolkit is given in the Introduction. I wish here to give credit to a number of people and institutions who have contributed to the completion of this toolkit. First and foremost, I would like to thank the Commonwealth of Learning which has contributed to the birth of this toolkit through its valuable support as a co-publisher and as a funder for its preparation and editing.

The primary author is Stephen Marquard, an ICT consultant specialising in applications of ICT in education and online learning and collaboration, with over a decade of experience in school networking and the educational application of ICT. Since starting the first school network in South Africa in 1993, he has subsequently worked with other national and regional Schoolnets in Africa in areas such as connectivity and network solutions for schools, e-learning programmes for teachers, projects addressing the digital divide in disadvantaged schools, the design of school intranets, online collaborative learning, and national educational ICT programmes and policies.

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For the value added offered by schoolnets to educational systems, we hope you find the toolkit useful.

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