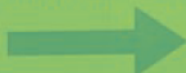


مرحبا بكم في تونس 2005  
اجتماع اللجنة التحضيرية - PREPCOM1

BIENVENUE À TUNIS 2005 WELCOME TO TUNIS 2005  
UNION PRÉPARATOIRE - PREPCOM1 PREPARATORY MEETING - PREPCOM1

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HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION

## VISIONS IN PROCESS II THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

GENEVA 2003 – TUNIS 2005

**Visions in Process II**  
**The World Summit on the Information Society**

**Geneva 2003 – Tunis 2005**

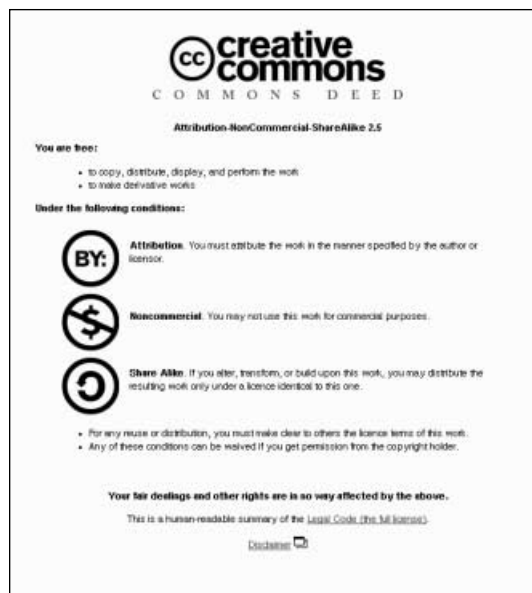
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## Introduction

The UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is drawing to a close after almost four years of intense political deliberations. The UN General Assembly's mandate to WSIS was to develop a common global vision of the new society emerging through the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to identify the strategies and ways to bring it about.

"While technology shapes the future, it is people who shape technology and decide what it can and should be used for," the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated, underlining the significance of this summit. While most global conferences deal with global threats, this one according to Annan was "to consider how to best use this new global asset" in ways that all people could benefit from its potential.

Can this endeavor be considered a success? Was the global community able to shape a common vision and to explore new ways of dealing with the complexity of the newly emerging policy issues?

Even if the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action which concluded the first phase of the summit attest to progress regarding many single issues, it is equally obvious that the proclaimed vision of an "inclusive, development-oriented information society" is built upon fragile compromises and contradictions. And at the time of writing, only a few weeks before the second summit will take place in Tunis in November 2005, it is still uncertain whether a convergence of the conflicting interests in the major issue of Internet governance will be achieved and whether agreements will be reached that guarantee a significant implementation and the follow-up efforts needed to meet the ambitious goals.

As the debate moved from the principles to the action lines it became obvious that WSIS, just like other international fora, to a large extent serves as a global arena in which the redistribution of money and power is fought out. There is much at stake when it comes to access and control of the key strategic resources of the Information Age: the means of communication as well as information and knowledge.

But it would be misleading to judge WSIS only in light of the final documents. It is the multi-stakeholder approach it has established, which has brought civil society and the private sector into the negotiation process, that has to be considered an important step towards a more democratic global governance. In this respect WSIS has set a standard that future negotiations will have to meet. The experiences and insights gained by the different stakeholders in the WSIS process have built a strong basis for enhancement of innovative participatory governance at all levels. Shaping a truly shared vision among all stakeholders is a burdensome long-term endeavor and will remain a work in progress. WSIS is an important starting point.

Right from the start of the WSIS process the Heinrich Böll Foundation has actively participated in it, aiming to enable civil society's meaningful participation and collaboration on regional and international levels. The foundation's offices in the Middle East, Nigeria and South Africa have supported civil society organizations to build capacities and networks and to bring their aims and views into WSIS. In the

Arab Middle East two regional preparatory conferences were organized in Amman and Beirut to strengthen coordination on the regional level. National roundtable discussions and dissemination of materials in Arabic supported capacity building and national consultations. With the same intentions, our offices in Nigeria and South Africa supported partner organizations in participating in various regional conferences such as Highway Africa, African Preparatory Conference in Accra and others.

In Germany, the foundation has encouraged a broad civil society discourse on WSIS that led to the publication of a *Charter of Civil Rights for a Sustainable Knowledge Society* at the beginning of the first phase of WSIS. This Charter emphasizes that it is primarily the right to free and open access to knowledge that is crucial to empower people to share knowledge enabling thus a sustainable development towards a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive society – in the South and North alike. Accordingly the concept of the *Knowledge Society* is used to draw a clear distinction to the technology-centred notion of the Information Society.

To strengthen civil society's capability to intervene by making transparent the negotiation processes within WSIS, the Heinrich Böll Foundation has set up [www.worldsummit2005.org](http://www.worldsummit2005.org), which features background documentation and on-site reporting of the WSIS process. And just before the first WSIS summit the foundation published *Visions in Process*, which presents civil society's assessments of the debates on principles in the Geneva phase.

This sequel, *Visions in Process II*, now brings together assessments by women from around the world who, for the most part, have been heavily involved in various civil society constituencies created during the WSIS process. The authors have been engaged in social movements and initiatives dedicated to promoting public awareness and activities in fields such as human rights, women's rights, and various development initiatives concerning media and ICTs.

Their contributions reflect on controversies within the discourses of governments and civil society on issues that lie at the core of the summit's declared vision of a people-centred, development-oriented, and inclusive Information Society: human rights, development and participation. Corresponding to these main controversies the book is organized in three sections:

**Section I** addresses the debates on human rights as these have been highly controversial at WSIS. Against the background of existing violations of fundamental human rights, such as the right of freedom of expression and the new threats posed through ICTs to the rights to access information, to privacy, etc., the debates within civil society have concerned the ways and strategies to enhance and enforce human rights implementation in all countries. The articles illustrate central aspects of the debates concerning the new "communication rights" concept, the divergent perspectives on development and human rights priorities, and address women's struggles to achieve gender equality and women's rights.

**Section II** combines articles that reflect on civil society involvement in WSIS and its multi-stakeholder approach. By describing and analyzing the structures, procedures and tasks that have characterized the participation of civil society groups, the authors raise questions about vital aspects of political participation, such as representation, inclusion and exclusion, resource allocation, legitimacy and transparency.

**Section III** unites articles that discuss ways of developing the Information Society, recognizing the great potential of ICTs for empowering people and transforming societies. Some articles focus on this potential in relation to development paradigms and question to what extent WSIS has met the development needs of the South. Others discuss tools and concepts for knowledge sharing and dissemination, capacity building, and adequate frameworks for media and ICT infrastructure regulation to harness ICTs for development.

While each article can be seen to focus on one of these debates in particular, it becomes clear that there are vital connections among these issues: While human rights and development priorities are often seen as unrelated or even opposed to each other, the articles show how the two should be linked in political strategies towards the envisioned society. And they demonstrate as well that the success of these strategies depends upon how diverse interests are taken into consideration and mediated through the involvement and participation of all relevant stakeholders.

Contrary to what the unifying term civil society may suggest, the stakeholder civil society is just as little unanimous as the governments and private sector are. This holds true for the contributions to this book as well, which represent distinct values and diverse agendas and assessments. Despite these differences, they represent a sense of civil society community, which has developed during the WSIS process, fostering networks that can be considered one of the lasting results of this summit.

This book, we believe, offers a timely and in-depth reflection on main aspects of the debates on WSIS that will be of prime relevance for years to come. It is addressed not only to United Nations and WSIS experts, but also aims to contribute to a broad public understanding of the significance of this world summit. Newcomers are additionally provided introductory information on the WSIS process, structures and terminology.

We thank all those who have contributed to this book in various ways, and are particularly grateful to our authors for stepping back from the hectic pace of WSIS negotiations in order to take the time to reflect on the issues, principles and processes that have shaped our involvement in this – at times frustrating but in any case instructive – process.

We hope that this book will transport the collaborative spirit that many of us have experienced during the past four years and will contribute, in however small a way, to lively discussions about WSIS and to progressively involving ever more people in the task of shaping a people-centred, development-oriented, and inclusive knowledge society.

Berlin and Ramallah, October 2005

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## I. Human Rights





# Communication rights: Building bridges for social action

Sally Burch

Any vision or development of the so-called “information society” that does not have human rights, and in particular those rights relating to communication, as its foundation, is likely to contribute to deepening social and economic gaps, or authoritarian models of society. Indeed, communication has become so central to our lives, and the forces controlling it so powerful, that defending and guaranteeing communication rights has become an imperative for the women’s movement, and indeed for any person or organization concerned with democracy, development and social justice.

During the process of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), this has been a key underlying issue. Not that the summit has broken new ground in this area. In fact it was an arduous struggle simply to get governments to agree to reaffirm the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in the final Geneva Declaration, and to recognize Article 19 on freedom of expression as a foundation of the Information Society.

Yet phase one of the summit process was unprecedented in the global interconnections it spurred among networks, organizations and activists that defend and promote communication rights. They came together around the common goal of counterbalancing the heavy bias towards technology as the driving force of development, present at the summit, by underlining the prior considerations of human needs and goals framed by social justice. The final version of the summit Declaration does, to some extent, reflect this influence.

In fact, this coalition of groups that came together around communication rights and social justice may well prove to be one of the most significant results of the WSIS process itself. It enabled civil society to become a critical voice counterbalancing the private sector agenda promoted by large corporations, and a force that governments acknowledged they had to take into account.

One of the main outputs was the Civil Society Declaration, launched at the Geneva summit, entitled *Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs*, subsequently endorsed by hundreds of organizations. It synthesizes in a single document the main proposals developed by civil society organizations (CSOs), providing significantly greater substance than the official documents. It does, of course, lack the political weight of a UN document, but could nonetheless prove a powerful mobilizing tool for future civil society intervention and serve as input for further developing arguments on policy issues. But maybe its greatest significance lies in the consensus process that brought it into being. The organizations involved consider it a major achievement, even though the official summit process only grudgingly acknowledged its existence.

The networks emerging from similar experiences have proven to be a key factor in ensuring follow-up. The succession of world conferences that took place in the 1990s and into this century, on fundamental issues of a global scope – environment, human rights, population, social development, women, racism, etc. – have had a

greater social impact when CSOs have mobilized to influence the outcomes and then continued to organize within and across national frontiers to press their governments to hold good to their commitments as well as to monitor progress. Numerous cases have shown that governmental commitments, especially on social issues, are rarely followed through on unless such mechanisms exist.

Moreover, the global interconnections made through these dynamics have often given rise to other forms of working together in new venues, contributing to building social movements and empowering them to exchange, connect and mobilize collectively.

The women's movement particularly comes to mind. Neither governmental policy on gender issues, nor the global nature of the women's movement itself, would be what they are today without the extensive networking that took place around the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. This experience empowered women to continue working together at other UN conferences – including WSIS –, bringing in a gender perspective, but also, increasingly, contributing their experience in organizing and offering leadership and alternative proposals on a variety of issues.

Today, following the civil society dynamics at WSIS, new possibilities have arisen for building a social movement around communication and rights issues. The present trends in communications point to an increasingly crucial role for such a global movement in defining and defending a communications framework that can guarantee people's democratic participation in shaping their societies and cultures.

### **Communication rights in debate**

The term “communication rights” refers to the body of existing rights under international and national law relating to freedom of expression, freedom of the press, democratic media governance, access to information, transparent governance, the right to participate in one's own culture, to education, privacy and peaceful assembly, among others.

In a number of countries, some of those rights are systematically violated. Freedom of expression, for example, is seen as a threat by certain authoritarian governments. In other cases, the policy framework is inadequate to ensure effective implementation, for instance of cultural rights. Moreover, new threats are emerging, even in societies generally considered democratic and protective of communication rights. While it is true that the rapid changes in the communications scenario resulting from the introduction of new technologies create enormous opportunities for more democratic communications, dangers also arise, especially due to the vastly increased capacity for concentration of data, knowledge and control. As a consequence, new mechanisms are called for to ensure the necessary checks and balances to prevent abuse of such power, which may well also entail the need to define new rights.

The WSIS process has contributed to reopening the debate on these issues. Many of us consider that acknowledgement of communication as a human right in itself – the “right to communicate” – could provide an overall framework for more effective implementation of communication rights. Others are of the opinion that the present legal framework is adequate though insufficiently enforced. Whatever the outcome of this debate, both positions agree that priority should be given to full

implementation of existing rights; and in any case, defining and adopting new rights is likely to entail a longer-term process. Nonetheless, the demand from civil society that communication should be treated as a universal right, over and above considerations of privilege or business, is a powerful argument for mobilizing action in support of communication rights.

The proposal did come up to include a right to communicate in the WSIS Geneva Declaration, which met with fierce opposition, though also some support. But paragraph 4 of the Declaration does imply acknowledgement of universal participation in communication processes. Following an endorsement of freedom of expression under the terms of the UDHR, it states: "Communication is a fundamental social process, a basic human need and the foundation of all social organization. It is central to the Information Society. Everyone, everywhere should have the opportunity to participate and no one should be excluded from the benefits the Information Society offers."

One might justifiably wonder if anything changes, simply because of inclusion in a UN summit declaration or action plan. In fact, its relevance is above all in terms of policy setting and legitimacy. Governments, multilateral bodies, people's organizations and others will refer to such documents for years to come in support of their plans, projects and demands. Making sure that a correct focus was firmly entrenched there was therefore of paramount importance.

A number of other existing rights are echoed in the Declaration, but some of the thorniest issues were evaded or only obliquely referred to. Among others, the need to reform intellectual property rights (IPR) to reflect a more equitable balance of commercial and public interests was not addressed at all, although significantly, a commitment to building the public domain of information and knowledge (para. 26) was included, which had been a key civil society demand. Media pluralism, diversity and independence are defended, and there is even a timid reference to encouraging diversity in media ownership (para. 55).

Actually, much of the civil society effort at WSIS went into trying to keep certain references that could mean a regression out of the official documents. On the thorny issue of security, for example, despite efforts to remove them, questionable references to "information security" remain in the documents, as does the phrase "prevent the use of information resources and technologies for criminal and terrorist purposes," whose vagueness and association with a highly political agenda threatens greater vulnerability for civil rights. But at least the security reference to "integrity of the military field" was removed.

As for the Plan of Action, approved in a rush before the summit with little opportunity for civil society input, although a number of specific civil society demands are included, many of us feel that the vision it conveys is contradictory with that of the Declaration of Principles, and that the technology-centred approach is again prevalent.

### **Issues for follow-up**

Communication rights struggles are taking place all around the world, at many levels and on many issues, but they are often unconnected to one another. They are happening in local communities, for example for the right to run community media or community broadband – both under threat or outlawed, even in many democratic

countries. Initiatives at the national level include demands for legislation to curb media monopolies, or protest against privacy invasion through antiterrorist laws. And on the international scene, there is action, for example, around cultural diversity or Internet governance (IG).

As globalization advances, the distinction between these levels becomes increasingly blurred. The laws and regulations affecting communication at the community level are usually determined nationally, while national legislation on, say, IPR is often dictated more by international trade rules and treaties than by national interests. This is why building a movement around communication rights that is networked nationally and globally has become so crucial.

The global level in particular presents new challenges, since communications systems are increasingly international, while information flows transcend national boundaries. Taking the examples mentioned of IPR and media diversity, IPR are being forced on countries under the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and Free Trade Agreements, with a strong bias towards protecting transnational corporate commercial interests. The communication rights movement defends the concept of information as a public good that must be protected as such. In this sense, it proposes a revision of the IP regime, so that the original intention of copyright, patents and trademarks, which is first and foremost to guarantee the public interest, can be retrieved.

There has been little connection, as yet, between the campaigns being organized around communications issues such as opposition to software patents, repeated prolongation of copyright protection, or the excessively



ly stringent IP laws on digital products, and those being waged against genetically modified seeds or for generic low-cost medicines for developing countries. Yet many of the issues are similar, and a combined endeavour to reform the international IP laws framework in favour of the development agenda and the public interest could strengthen the specific campaigns. In fact, alliances may be possible with some governments on these issues. A group of countries, led by Brazil and Argentina, recently made a proposal in the UN World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), to establish a development agenda. The proposal had widespread support, but was rejected by the US and Japan.

Another key area for both national and global action is media diversity and independence. But today, the threat to media independence no longer comes mainly from governments and political forces, but from large corporate conglomerates. National legislation and regulations are being relaxed under pressure from such conglomerates, as their concentration of power spreads its tentacles across different kinds of media. Also, clauses in trade agreements can reduce a country's ability to

control foreign media investment. Public opinion in many countries is increasingly exasperated by the tight circle of common interest that binds economic and media power, in many cases hand in hand with political power. An important challenge for the communication rights movement is to channel that dissatisfaction towards proposals and action, aimed at putting restraints on corporate media power and concentration. In the US, a media reform campaign has recently registered several successes in holding back the tide of media concentration.

Internet governance is another new area of concern that has come under the spotlight at WSIS. The technical complexities risk pulling the wool over our eyes concerning basic rights issues that need to be guaranteed in any solution coming out of the process. But in fact, the underlying issues are fairly straightforward. The WSIS Internet Governance Caucus, in a recent reaction to the report of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) formed at WSIS, hails the inclusion of fundamental values such as “freedom of expression, data protection and privacy rights, consumer rights, multilingualism, capacity building and meaningful participation in Internet governance processes.” But it also criticizes the failure to deal with other issues such as, “addressing human rights as a cross-cutting principle in relation to evolution and use of the Internet. Nothing in Internet governance negotiations must impair, restrict, or contradict universally agreed human rights,” and laments that “New instruments to govern Intellectual Property on the Internet ... have been developed without effective consideration of the rights and interests of end-users.”

### **Towards a social agenda in communication**

One of the main actors on communication rights at WSIS has been the CRIS Campaign: Communication Rights in the Information Society. Launched in early 2002, a few months before the first WSIS preparatory meeting, CRIS played a crucial role especially in the early stages, by facilitating dialogue and consensus seeking on both process and content among CSOs at the Summit Preparatory Committee meetings (PrepComs). This contributed to CSOs being able to organize rapidly for lobbying and formulating common positions.

CRIS has also been active in other venues such as the drafting process of the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity. And it has been present several times at the World Social Forum (WSF), an ideal space to reach out to other social movements not involved in the WSIS process. Following the Tunis summit in November 2005, CRIS will wrap up the campaign, but has plans to participate in the launch of a new global initiative around communication rights, for which it hopes to join forces with other actors working on these issues. And in Latin America, those networks that have been active in CRIS are in the process of launching a Continental Campaign for Communication Rights.

By interconnecting the different specific issues and fights under the common communication rights banner, the way is being paved for mutual support on key matters. But on some major issues, the interests at stake are too large for a still small movement of communications-related organizations to be able to effectively take them on alone. The touchstone is mutual solidarity and common agendas with other social movements.

Indeed, issues such as media plurality, freedom of expression, a free Internet, protection of personal privacy, cultural and linguistic diversity or access to informa-

tion directly affect large segments, if not the great majority of the population. Mobilizing both organized groups and wider public opinion will be crucial to bringing about change. And for that, conditions are at present particularly favourable.

That is because the advent of the millennium witnessed a new wave of social networking, as social movements around the globe coincided in recognizing that their specific concerns have a common central adversary: neoliberal economic policy instigated through multilateral financial institutions. This trend gained worldwide fame through the successive mobilizations against the WTO, G8 and International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank (WB) meetings, beginning with Seattle in December 1999. Though in fact, at least in Latin America, where social movements have developed the fastest over the past decade, by the mid to late 1990s, there were already liaison dynamics taking place in opposition to market dominated globalization, involving small and landless farmers, indigenous peoples, community groups, women's organizations, church-related groups and many others.

From 2001, the WSF became the main space for such movements to come together globally, not, this time, for protest action, nor in reactive mode, but to develop their own agenda for building "another possible world." The novelty of the WSF has been its ability to bring together widely different movements and social groups to build common agendas, where each group is not only concerned with their specific issue, but connects it to the concerns of others.

The WSF can be credited for the breadth and interconnectedness of the mobilizations against the war in Iraq, on February 15, 2003; it contributed to the effectiveness of the mobilizations on Cancun that put the WTO negotiations on hold (2003), and it acted as a catalyst for the Campaign against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) that was a major factor in postponing negotiations, initially planned to have concluded in 2004.

Among movements such as these, there is growing alarm at how market forces and powerful interests are taking control of communications. At the same time, they themselves are increasingly dependent on the Internet for networking and organizing. Such movements provide the potential nucleus of a wider social force to mobilize around these issues, raise public opinion, put pressure on governments, and press for mechanisms to distribute control more equitably in the communications arena.

But the initiative and proposals need to come from the groups already mobilized on communication issues. Thus if civil society action at WSIS has contributed to generating more favourable conditions for building a social movement agenda in favour of communication rights, that will in itself be a significant outcome, whether or not it is registered in the official results or monitoring process. Certainly the women's movement will have significant contributions to make to that agenda.

## Human rights: The missing link

Rikke Frank Jørgensen and Meryem Marzouki

The Human Rights Caucus was set up at the first Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in July 2002, when civil society structures were only just beginning to take shape. The purpose of the caucus has been to create a forum where human rights organizations involved in the WSIS process could coordinate and strengthen efforts to have human rights firmly placed on the WSIS agenda. Human rights are understood to encompass the civil and political rights of citizens, as well as their economic, cultural and social rights, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

During the WSIS process, the caucus has developed oral and written inputs and contributions on how human rights, as broadly defined as they are, can be translated within the specific framework of information and communication technologies (ICTs), in order to realize a human rights-based vision of the Information Society. As part of this, a number of public events have been held during the WSIS PrepComs in order to raise awareness among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others on the influence of human rights within this context.

The caucus today consists of 63 international and national organizations from all continents, which are concerned with the impact and challenges which the development of the Information Society poses to human rights protection and enforcement. This includes both human rights organizations in the classical sense and more specialized organizations, including trade unions.<sup>1</sup> During the WSIS process, the struggle for human rights has taken many forms and met resistance on many levels.

### The battle with governments

The most visible battle has taken place between civil society groups and government delegations. One central issue of controversy concerned the caucus's aim to have governments reaffirm that the development of the Information Society, thus the political vision of WSIS, should have the internationally established human rights norms and standards as its foundation. Up until the very last days before the Geneva summit in December 2003, it was still unresolved whether all government delegations would support a reference to the UDHR in the opening paragraphs of the WSIS Declaration of Principles. It is now official WSIS politics that human rights are indeed the point of reference for all WSIS-related activities.

However, even though this is a gratifying and concrete result, it is also an indicator of the low level of state ambition when it comes to human rights. Presently, formal commitment to human rights law is *de facto* in place in most countries, and the real challenge remains the ability to translate this commitment into *de facto* politics and action.

1 Detailed information available at the Human Rights Caucus's website:  
<http://www.iris.sgdg.org/actions/smsi/hr-wsis/>



The Human Rights Caucus has spent many interventions arguing that the true challenge is to explicitly address and improve the many areas in which ICTs threaten human rights. The effective realization of human rights, such as freedom of expression, access to information and knowledge, etc., is essential to education, citizen empowerment, democratic participation, equal opportunities, cultural and linguistic diversity, economic development and innovation, which all lead to overall social wealth. If human rights are violated, this has a negative impact on the level of development. Wherever surveillance, monitoring and censorship are exercised, wherever legislation and administrative regulation lead to legal insecurity and breaches of the rule of law, this results in a strong negative impact on Internet development and user confidence, as well as on the economy of Information Society services. In addition, working conditions and regulation that comply with human rights standards, not least the right to privacy at work, are essential to create a sustainable Information Society economy at both micro and macro level.

After the last 55 years of increased ratification of human rights laws in the areas of civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights, there is now an urgent need to move from state commitment to policy action. Sadly, the WSIS process has still not shown political will to address this challenge, but has on the contrary manifested continuous resistance to address areas vital to an Information Society respectful of human rights. Following are a few examples.



The WSIS Declaration of Principles lacks a reference to the fundamental and crosscutting principle of non-discrimination, which should have been mentioned in one of the opening paragraphs. It also lacks reference to international labour standards. Concerning privacy and security, there is hardly any focus on the privacy threats posed by still more invasive measures to retain, monitor and access citizens' data, since the WSIS Declaration of Principles focuses almost entirely on national security threats and cybercrime.

Regarding "enabling environment" and the rule of law, it is stated in the WSIS Declaration of Principles that the regulatory framework is expected to reflect national realities. The caucus has strongly criticized that the rule of law and the regulatory framework are expected to "reflect national realities" instead of being consistent with the legally binding obligations of states according to the international human rights treaties they have ratified. Furthermore, crucial policy areas related to information ownership and the public domain, pricing for Internet access, structures for Internet governance, etc., remain within existing structures of power and trade, and have not yet been revised to reflect the vision of a more inclusive and equitable Information Society.

When addressing the resistance to the promotion of human rights coming from government delegations, one should be careful not to simplify the layers of resist-

ance. Needless to say, there are a number of countries known for their bad human rights record, and this lack of respect for basic human rights is no different in the WSIS context. However, there are also more subtle forms of resistance, in which countries that are generally more supportive of human rights nevertheless refuse to address established regimes of information ownership, access to and governance of information. Moreover, the majority of countries which promote an agenda driven by state security considerations are unwilling to acknowledge the threat that this agenda raises for individuals' right to privacy, and their rightful claim to remain free from surveillance when communicating online.

The official WSIS documents and implementation mechanisms are devoid of any mechanism to advance the human rights agenda. The Human Rights Caucus, supported by the Civil Society Plenary, and the International Symposium on the Information Society, Human Dignity and Human Rights (convened by the People's Movement for Human Rights Education in November 2003) has proposed establishing an Independent Commission on the Information Society and Human Rights, composed of qualified experts with a broad geographical representation, to monitor practices and policies on human rights and the Information Society. So far, there has been no political will to establish such a human rights monitoring mechanism.

### **The struggle within civil society**

Within the civil society groups active in the WSIS process, there have also been battles related to human rights. One of the heated issues during the first phase was the issue of a right to communicate, promoted by the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) Campaign as a new human right. The proposal met with criticism from a number of human rights groups, who argued that rather than to advocate for a new and broadly defined right, the substance of the so-called right to communicate could be promoted by enforcing a number of already existing human rights, such as freedom of expression, the right to enjoy one's culture and the right to privacy. After many discussions, it appeared that this controversy was the result of a confrontation between different backgrounds within civil society groups: the so-called right to communicate is mainly a resurgence of the battle around a "New World Information and Communication Order" of the 1970s, which was instrumentalized by many governments during those cold war times to oppose civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights on the other hand.

Fortunately, the debate within civil society on this issue at WSIS was resolved by the end of the first phase. While the "right to communicate" slogan may still be referred to, this happens mainly as a group or campaign self-identification rather than as a political analysis. This agreement that the legitimate claim for effective enjoyment of a right to communicate need not invent new legal standards, but should rather concert in the call for enforcement of existing human rights standards, clearly appeared during the "World Forum on Communication Rights,"<sup>2</sup> co-organized by, among others, the CRIS Campaign and the Human Rights Caucus as a side event of the first summit in Geneva in December 2003.

2 See the web site of this event: <http://www.communicationrights.org/>

Another sensitive topic within civil society groups was the linkage between human rights and development. In the process of finalizing the Civil Society Declaration for the Geneva summit, a number of organizations claimed that the issue of development (poverty reduction and economic and social development) was to take priority over human rights, thus insisting that the Declaration should not open with human rights language. This perspective is troublesome since it presupposes a distinction between development and human rights, rather than recognizing that the two are intimately related, as was time and again stressed at the Vienna World Summit on Human Rights in 1993. Extreme poverty and the massive disparities in access to information and to the means of communication are at the same time a cause and a consequence of the unequal distribution of wealth in the world and within countries. This severely diminishes the capabilities of people to enjoy their human rights, specially the right to an adequate standard of living, and prevents economic and social development. It is thus crucial that the politics around development are addressed and evaluated within a human rights framework.

The debate is a reminder of the fact that a number of civil society organizations (CSOs) do not see human rights as the normative foundation for any society, independently of the level of development, but rather as something secondary to issues of development. On the other hand, many CSOs, especially from Northern countries, show a rather restricted understanding of human rights, in that they may only consider, among the whole set of human rights, civil and political rights – or even solely the freedom of expression issue.

Unfortunately, it seems that this is a contradiction within civil society that will hardly be resolved by the end of WSIS, unlike the discussions concerning the right to communicate. One reason is the high level of heterogeneity of backgrounds and objectives among CSOs, which has especially surfaced in WSIS because of the very transversal aspects of issues dealt with during this summit, compared to other international conferences. Another specificity of WSIS has been its relative openness to CSOs, far beyond the usual NGO family. Being part of civil society (CS) is not enough to agree on everything so that consensus can be reached inside CS, because CS is diverse, heterogeneous. It will take years to reach a better understanding of each other, and, hopefully, to shape common analyses and strategies. The fact remains that, more than 15 years after the end of the cold war, the main lines of conflicts have not evolved much, though they perhaps appear in more subtle ways. WSIS has been another opportunity to show that, given such a heterogeneous set of actors, the coalescing into stakeholder groups does not necessarily follow simple statutory criteria, where stakeholders are identified in terms of governments, civil society, etc., but rather reflects well-identified particular interests, depending on what is at stake.

### **Tunisia hosting WSIS: Human rights not found!**

With Tunisia hosting WSIS second phase, the contradiction reaches its acme. Tunisia's bad record on human rights and democracy is blatant, and has been well-documented for years by internationally recognized human rights organizations, as well as through intergovernmental human rights mechanisms like UN special rapporteurs. This bad record is also obvious in the Information Society context: Blocking of websites, including news and information websites, police surveillance and interception of communications, press censorship, and all other elements of the

most repressive regimes, right up to imprisonment of individuals for their opinions and media activities, are common practices in a country under the reign of the arbitrary.

In this situation, the choice of Tunisia to host the second phase of WSIS appears to many as paradoxical. This is an erroneous analysis, however. Not only has Tunisia been chosen by the UN General Assembly without much discussion or reluctance, but the initial idea of holding a UN summit on the Information Society, suggested to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Plenipotentiary meeting in 1998, came from Tunisia. Here again, the main contradiction of this summit appears, and of its participants, governments and civil society, as well. WSIS was envisaged, proposed, accepted, drafted, prepared and set up with an understanding of “information society” restricted to an infrastructure development agenda, and did not take into account the broader human rights dimensions of the Information Society.

From a strict infrastructure point of view, Tunisia does not necessarily appear as a bad choice. In terms of indicators of Internet use by the population, Tunisia is indeed fairly well ranked. The figures, however, must be carefully scrutinized and seen within the proper perspective. With 6.4 % Internet users in the total population in 2003, Tunisia is well above the North African average, and the only countries to do better in Africa are South Africa, Sao Tome and Principe, Mauritius, Seychelles and Reunion.<sup>3</sup> Compared to other regions of the world and to groups of countries with the same level of income and development, Tunisia is above the average for developing countries and for Arab countries. Yet it remains below the average for Eastern Asian and Pacific countries, Latin America and the Caribbean, and CEE-CIS countries. It is also below the average for intermediate income countries.<sup>4</sup>

Be that as it may, one of the major achievements of civil society in WSIS has been to remind everyone, beginning with governments and UN agencies themselves, that the Information Society is not just about infrastructure, and that the “digital divide” simply reflects the political, social, economic and cultural divide among and within nations. From this holistic understanding of an Information Society, Tunisia hosting WSIS has become a hardly acceptable situation for most participants.

Already from an early stage, the Human Rights Caucus felt very concerned with Tunisia as the venue of the second world summit. However, its strategy has never been to boycott the summit process, considering it on the contrary as a tremendous opportunity for placing Tunisia in the spotlight of the international community and for networking with international civil society groups. In addition, the caucus has found it to be more efficient to act from inside the process, since this summit is of high importance to the Tunisian government. The caucus has also wanted to act in agreement with independent Tunisian NGOs and in accordance with their demands. The general idea has thus been to obtain as much progress as possible: serious, concrete, sustainable, and measurable progress, regarding the situation of human

3 Source: International Telecommunication Union. Internet indicators: hosts, users and number of PCs. Annual statistics 2003. <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>

4 Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2004. Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*, New York, 2004.

rights in Tunisia. Given the heterogeneous composition of WSIS participants, especially the civil society actors, the caucus has followed a step-by-step strategy.<sup>5</sup>

The first step, undertaken during WSIS first phase and the first PrepCom of WSIS second phase, has been to reach maximum visibility and understanding of the Tunisian human rights issues, especially in the Information Society context: the double objective thus being to strengthen the solidarity of the international civil society and to put pressure on governments.

The second step, taken at PrepCom-2 of WSIS second phase, has been to focus on fact-finding and expressing demands to the Tunisian government. To this end, two monitoring missions were conducted in Tunisia, one of them organized and strongly supported by three member organizations<sup>6</sup> of the caucus and strongly supported by the whole caucus as an entity. The objective of this mission was to produce an assessment tool on the situation in Tunisia in order to answer the following two questions: (1) What are the operational conditions for civil society participating in the Tunis summit? (2) What is the state of human rights in the Information Society context in Tunisia? The mission organizers set the following conditions for the work of the experts: (1) Ensure the independent and objective character of the production of this assessment tool; (2) Comply with a global conception of human rights, respecting their indivisible and universal character, in adherence with the rule of law, and allowing for their effective enjoyment. When the monitoring reports were written and disseminated during PrepCom-2, the message to the Tunisian government was clear. It now had the chance to prove that the summit would be held under good conditions in Tunis, by answering in a serious, concrete, sustainable and measurable way to the basic demands of the independent Tunisian civil society, thus addressing the areas of concern established by the missions.

The third step, scheduled for PrepCom-3 of WSIS second phase, consists in the assessment and decision-making by international civil society, as well as by governments. If basic demands of the independent Tunisian civil society have not been satisfied, and no progress has been shown, then the Tunis summit may well be seriously perturbed by alternative events organized in Tunis.

### **Conclusion: Spinning the missing link**

Beyond all problems and contradictions, even beyond the particular issue of Tunisia, one of the main outcomes of WSIS has been to initiate discussions on an incredibly large range of issues, among an equally incredibly heterogeneous set of actors. Speaking more specifically on human rights, the role of the WSIS Human Rights Caucus should be acknowledged for what it has been able to achieve in terms of placing human rights on the WSIS agenda, despite the many difficulties encountered, of which only some have been mentioned here. The WSIS process and debates have moved from infrastructure to a much broader human rights focus, and an increasing number of actors within governments, industry and civil society address Information Society issues within a human rights framework. However, the main

5 Details of actions conducted by the caucus on this issue may be found at: <http://www.iris.sgdg.org/actions/smsi/hr-wsis/tunis.html>

6 The International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH), the World Organization against Torture (OMCT) and Rights and Democracy.

and huge task that remains is to spin the missing human rights link that has run as a current throughout the WSIS process.

More than 10 years ago, in Vienna at the World Conference on Human Rights, over 170 governments collectively stated that human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent. WSIS has shown that there is still a long way to go to have governments, as well as civil society, recognize that human rights is not a sectoral issue relevant to certain stakeholders only, but the normative framework by which we build, monitor and evaluate any society. In the months leading up to the summit in Tunisia and beyond, the Human Rights Caucus will continue to address these failures, or blocking points, showing the way and setting the agenda for further work.

## Freedom of expression in the Information Society?

Tracey Naughton

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers.*

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The right to freedom of thought, opinion and expression is guaranteed to all global citizens and is framed by Article 19 of the UDHR, which was universally agreed to by all governments. Despite this, not every nation state enables this right; and not all global citizens are aware of it. In nations where freedom of expression is held up as a beacon of national democracy, it is regularly undermined, sometimes subtly and often blatantly. The freedom of expression environment in Tunisia, host country of the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), has come under increased and legitimate scrutiny in the WSIS process. But the question should be asked, “Is its lack of adherence to this right, under the pretence of the argument of staged development, any worse than the gradual erosion of human rights in developed nations, under the guise of anti-terrorist legislation?”

It may seem self-evident that a United Nations process about the Information Age of humanity would begin with an affirmation of existing rights – especially when they have a direct relationship to the Information Age. However, this was not the case in WSIS, where fundamental rights were up for re-negotiation. Global negotiations, such as WSIS, are located in a complex and duplicitous environment. A challenge for participants is to accept this diversity and still work at a principled and productive level. Such practice can in itself be a mechanism for change.

The Media Caucus was one of the groupings within WSIS that civil society self-organized itself into. Media actors present for the Plenary meetings in the first phase of WSIS, where the multi-stakeholders sat together (but only at designated times and not necessarily so comfortably), recognised early that WSIS was a new arena for the same old debates about censorship. Some left immediately, others reduced their expectations, some realised that the stakes were high in terms of potential loss of rights. Article 19 fundamentalists stayed on in defence mode, taking almost no time for an orientation to new challenges and ethical questions raised by the rapidly changing communications environment. From the outset, the content framework has been restrictive for media participants.

### **Freedom of expression: A fundamental in the Information Society?**

In freedom of expression terms, phase one of WSIS was a shocking experience. Only in the last minutes of the last hour of debate, and with a great deal of resistance from some states, was Article 19 of the UDHR reaffirmed in the WSIS Declaration of Principles as a key principle for the “information society.” Similarly, reference to the media as a conduit of information narrowly scraped into the Declaration. These pro-



visions, which it should not have been necessary to argue, or fight so hard for, required a concerted lobbying campaign by the Media Caucus.

Freedom of expression, guaranteed by Article 19, was universally agreed to in 1948 – more than fifty years ago. That a United Nations process would countenance not linking it to any construct of the Information Society sent a chilling message about the state of the nations, and the limitations for debate in WSIS, worryingly, perhaps in any UN context.

### **What is freedom of expression?**

In the hierarchy of human rights, freedom of expression is espoused as a cornerstone that enables many other rights. It is an essential component of a democratic system and is a mechanism that respects human dignity. However, many states within WSIS argued in phase one that it is a right with inherent dangers that undermine sovereignty.

Although all the thematic contents of expression and information are protected by the human rights system, international jurisprudence tends to give more latitude to some modalities of expression, such as political discourse, and to allow states greater discretion in the regulation of others, such as commercial propaganda. Political discourse should be understood in the broadest sense of circulation of information, ideas, criticism and opinions regarding affairs of general public interest. The notion that freedom of expression is intimately linked to the concept of democracy is particularly applicable to political debate.

Freedom of expression has an individual and a collective dimension. International jurisprudence also holds that if the freedom of expression of an individual is restricted, not only is the individual's right being violated, but so is the right of all to receive information and impart ideas. For example, if one citizen is punished for criticism of a head of state, it follows that information producers such as journalists will practice self-censorship to avoid punitive results. This has the impact of limiting informed public debate. The general principle that freedom of expression may not affect the rights to privacy, honour and reputation of others should be understood with greater latitude when criticism of public figures is involved. Public figures in democratic states, by their nature, must be robust enough to withstand, even appreciate, criticism and opposition. It is part of their job description.

### **The freedom of expression debate in WSIS**

The defence of offensive opinions, which vary from one context to another, is one of the demands of pluralism, tolerance and broad-mindedness, touted as “norms” of democratic society. A number of states have argued in WSIS that there is a need to introduce such concepts gradually and in ways that are culturally appropriate. The main arguments proffered by states opposed to reaffirming freedom of expression as a principle of the Information Society have been about protecting citizens from “harmful” information including pornography and the need for staged introduction of information to people who have lived their lives without access to information, often immersed in a sheltered cultural context. One African government delegate in WSIS argued in a private conversation that while people are regularly convicted for stealing, or hurting someone, others are free to produce information and ideas that can plunge people who are weaker, less literate and more easily influenced into

doubt, anguish and confusion. As someone who works daily with people who fit this description, I subscribe to this argument, though always with a caveat demanding progress towards a scenario where all humans enjoy their full human rights.

No one can be expected to know what they do not know. People, particularly in less developed contexts, are not always in possession of the criteria enabling them to judge what is good or what is evil, what is truth and what is conjecture. Some states argued that they are the best judges of how information should be introduced to their populations. Of course, this is a subjective, problematic and inherently dangerous power to allow a state. Herein lies the important role of external pressure and monitoring of human rights.

Since many states are in various stages of transition to democracy, there cannot be a definitive right or wrong scenario. What is clear from a development paradigm is that the potential does exist for people on the off-line side of the “digital divide” to be destabilised by certain types of information. This perspective may be a challenge for people in over-developed contexts to grasp, but it strongly resonates in contexts where people have not enjoyed long-term access to information or freedom of expression.

Few nations are truly compliant with the full set of human rights. Those states regarded as pariahs by mature democracies have more questions than immediate solutions. What is the demarcation line between sovereign rule and global governance? Is it reasonable to demand fast tracking of democratic developments, and who has the right to design the methodology and terms? What spaces in global contexts are there for parallel, contradictory and evolving approaches by the same entity – in this context, sovereign states at different stages of defining and implementing their own democratic development? Enforcing change and external “norms” is often perceived by transitional states as puritanical and patronising.

### **South Africa: Poster child of democracy or replacement hierarchy?**

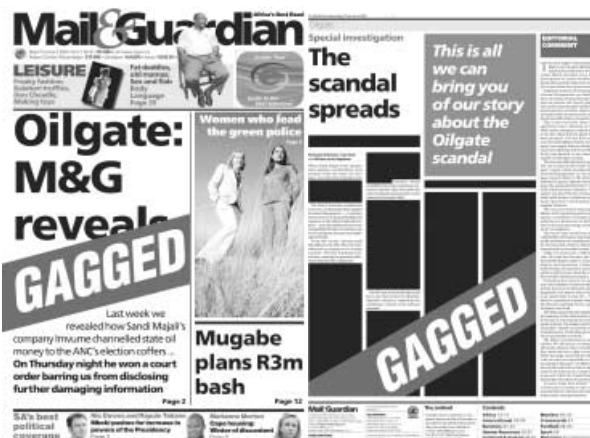
South Africa is a nation transformed from inhumane dominance by a few over a majority. It is often cited as a good model of contemporary democracy and accorded high moral status when it speaks collectively. Its mentoring role in Africa is significant. However, there are cracks in its democratic façade, and there is increasing evidence of government control of information flow to citizens through the mass media. Freedom of expression is subtly being undermined in ways that are not yet registering on the radar screens of most citizens but which are increasingly evident to media freedom organizations. Let me give a few examples.

In mid-May 2005, South Africa’s best-read independent newspaper, the *Mail and Guardian*, published a story revealing a corporate governance scam that resulted in a considerable injection of public funds to the ruling party coffers. This happened just prior to the national elections of 2004, when campaign funds were required. Letters of credit relating to the purchase of oil were exchanged in the scam that has become known as “oilgate.” A week later, the same paper was going to expose high profile individuals who were said to have benefited from the deal, a matter the media argues was clearly in the public interest to know. While the printing presses were running, the Johannesburg High Court granted an interdict to stop the *Mail and Guardian* paper from publishing the report. In a manner reminiscent of the Apartheid era, the *Mail and Guardian* published the newspaper issue with large sections

blacked out. This had not happened since the late 1980s, and here it was again in 2005. Now this small independent newspaper is suing the “Public Protector” who was pivotal in the interdict, and who recently “cleared” the parties to the alleged scam of any wrongdoing.

Another example: On 12 July 2005, the South African Police Services in Queens-town brutally assaulted and then opened fire on unarmed, peaceful protesters asking for HIV treatment. Forty people were injured and ten were treated for gunshot wounds. At least ten of the injured people were people who live openly with HIV/AIDS. The majority of the protesters were women. At no stage was there violence, threat of violence or any form of provocation from the protesters. No warning to disperse was issued by the police, as is required by law. After the assault, as people ran away, the police continued their fire and then used teargas. This had not happened since the 1980s, and here it was again in 2005. The national broadcaster, increasingly accused of state control by media freedom watchdogs, did not deem this to be newsworthy.

A final example: Recently, the Deputy President was heckled and booed at a public function. The national broadcaster left this out of the nightly news. The independent channel included it. When asked about the omission, the national broadcaster denied having been there. In response, the independent broadcaster showed photographs taken at the event with the national broadcaster camera operator in them. Later, an internal enquiry found the cameraman had made the decision that the event was not newsworthy – the messenger was shot.



## Tunisia and the pace of development

Arguably, there are few nations that truly offer freedom of expression and information to their citizens. Many in the less developed world see the loudest advocates of these rights to be practicing a deceitful approach nationally, and they view it as an external policy being pushed onto developing and transitional democracies.

To exercise rights, citizens have to have information about rights. The manner and tone in which rights are introduced and explained to citizens is a key determinant of how the rights will be understood. If rights are seen to be undermining a sovereign context that citizens hold dear, if they are seen to be externally imposed, the natural reaction is resistance, even in circumstances when there is not any fundamental disagreement with the validity of these rights.

The right to freedom of thought, opinion and expression should hold true no matter what orientation, perspective or period of history a nation and citizens are based in. The challenge within a global negotiation is to create a space that includes a plurality of approaches. Everyone wants to head towards a similar destination – a

global environment that practices human rights, tolerates diversity and allows us all to live in peace, with our own beliefs. Not everyone has an experiential basis of these conditions to work from.

Tunisia's approach to freedom of expression has occupied expanding spaces as the WSIS process has unfolded. Tunisia was not alone in arguing its right to interpret information flow in its own way. For me, this stance is not as simple as violating freedom of expression, though I acknowledge the unacceptable incarceration and inhumane treatment of Tunisian citizens who have exercised freedom of expression. From the perspective of a citizen of South Africa, an emerging democracy that is far from perfect and that remains strategically repressive, Tunisia appears as another state in a self-determined transition to a self-defined democracy. Europe was not democratized as fast as Africa is being compelled to by the holders of purse strings. Long-established democracies are not necessarily as democratic as they claim.

As Tunisia has come increasingly under the freedom of expression microscope, I have had pause to ask, from a humanist perspective, and from an African one, where one lives in a context of many democracies that are works in progress, "Are we practicing the human rights we advocate for? How do we allow for different perspectives and stages of development, while at the same time deepening and defining the universally agreed rights that enable humans to reach their potential?"

The conflict that erupted during PrepCom-1 in Tunisia was entirely predictable. The protests about Tunisia hosting the phase two summit had begun in phase one but had festered in the background. It could have been processed differently, and more humanely, but human-centred process has not been a feature of WSIS. We just talk about it.

### **The Media Caucus and its inclusive approach**

The second phase of WSIS has seen an increased level of participation by Tunisian citizens. There were a lot of Swiss involved in the first phase, which was held in Geneva. Many of the Tunisian participants are active – in a range of ways – in the Tunisian information context. In this regard, they have participated in the Media Caucus, where they have found a space in which it is possible to support principles that are not realised to their full extent in Tunisia.

We live in a world where the democratic norms of the industrialized nations dominate political debate, where economic power is equated with moral right. We live in a world where there is considerable, and terrifying, resistance to this dominance. Bringing this down to the WSIS context, my reaction as a grassroots-oriented development activist is to walk in the shoes of the people and nations with less power and to consider how I would respond under these circumstances. I would be defensive and resistant to whatever is being argued as the only way. I would question the real motives. I would insist on self-determination and resent the imposition of so-called "norms." There is nothing more likely to evoke the inner child in a human being or a political system than being put down, attacked and told you are wrong, especially by forces that you may perceive as hypocritical. Taking into consideration my stance on development and my stance on freedom of expression and placing these within my responsibilities as Chair of the WSIS Media Caucus, I took some deliberate decisions about approach. I believe the outcome of the caucus, particularly in phase two,

has reduced the potential achievement in terms of content, but has enhanced the sustainability and potential impact of the results.

By taking time in caucus meetings to convey the origins and meaning of freedom of expression, the Media Caucus attained an affirmation of freedom of expression from a group of sixty participants, mostly journalists and mainly Tunisians – people from both developed and less developed contexts. Was this of more or less value than a campaign to expose the violations of freedom of expression in Tunisia? It was certainly more process- and people-centred. One communication rights advocate labelled the Media Caucus statement from PrepCom-2 (WSIS phase two) as “mush.” For its signatories and authors, it was a victory of principles over a focus on particular states. It was also an enlightening and informative approach.

The Media Caucus has also attracted criticism from among the dominant NGOs, coalitions and networks within WSIS for not tackling broader issues. There are plenty of these – the Industrial Age produced a media constrained by ownership monopolies and oligopolies; a media that has subscribed to the economic rationalist paradigm and been complicit in underdevelopment of new ways of thinking; a media that has been coerced into placing profit before content; a media that is showing recalcitrance in embracing democratic media. If the circumstances had been different, it would have been wonderful to unpack these issues. This work still has to be done.

In my view, different and parallel approaches, some adversarial and some co-operative, are going to achieve more than one or the other. Criticism of the Media Caucus’s process plus content strategies, whilst welcome, has for me been cause for disillusionment with key individuals and policy-orientated networks in WSIS, who have failed to appreciate diversity in approach. In turn, this has focused my concern about the replication of global power imbalances in an emerging NGO power elite. That old truism comes to mind – the more things change, the more they stay the same. It makes a mockery of the call for human-centred approaches and diversity and pluralism. As a member of WSIS civil society, I am concerned by our duplicitous behaviour. The Media Caucus approach is only one approach, but it has proved that it is possible to reaffirm freedom of expression, even if it is not fully realised in the majority of caucus members’ national contexts. It seems to me that this approach has a positive forward momentum, especially when the erosion of the freedom of expression right was a real possibility.

Human-centred approaches are essential as we move beyond WSIS into the Information Age, but we must not call for them and not practice them. We speak of technical determinism in the negative, but have not been very skilful at practicing socially determined process in our own working environment. The inequitable legacy of global political and economic development to date is the root cause of our global social disaster. This can only lead to increased conflict unless there is an increased level of re-humanization of the way forward. In Xhosa, a language spoken in Southern Africa, this concept is encapsulated in the equalising word “ZIBONELE,” meaning walking together at the same pace, regardless of what you think you know in relation to what you think other people know. This calls for a deliberate adjustment to a pace that is inclusive. It is reflected in the African concept of “Ubuntu,” where we can only exist in relation to each other.

# Women's rights, media and ICTs

Essia Belhassen

In many countries, it is still difficult to promote women's rights through the media. Women often have a hard time liberating themselves from official discourse. This can be a result of governments' control over their national media or of the difficulties that minorities and women face in accessing media. This situation is not that different in my country, Tunisia, where groups and associations supporting the rights of women continue to be marginalized by the official media.

This text tells the story of women struggling to get their word out in the Tunisian public sphere. But this Tunisian story is probably not very different from other stories women could tell the world over. The observations are based on our experience as the *Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates* (Tunisian Association of Democratic Women – ATFD), an autonomous feminist association defending women's rights and promoting their equality with men. The association, which tackles the democratic question in Tunisia from the perspective of gender equality, permits us to understand the dynamics in Tunisia and abroad, since it is a civil society group active in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process.

We will start by looking at the obstacles that prevent women from sharing their discourse with fellow citizens and then analyse how women's capability to act and carry out projects of their own are limited by a set of factors. We dedicate a section to the place and role women could take up in the "information society" and conclude by considering the opportunities and new barriers to entry that stem from the WSIS process.

## At the discourse level

The dissemination of a feminist discourse in Tunisia is difficult. This is true both for the promotion of activities through the national media and for the channelling of an alternative vision on women's rights, as could frequently be observed by the association I work for. The following two reasons explain the media censorship: Firstly, the association's discourse about women's rights and women's liberation goes beyond the official discourse. And secondly, the entire media sector in Tunisia is under the guidance and control of a state that makes extensive use of repressive press legislation. In this context, the place of the autonomous women's movement in the Tunisian media is extremely reduced, not to say absent. The public sphere carries the weight of a cultural and political heritage rooted in state centralism. It perpetuates a patriarchal government model in which the media, confined to a narrow frame of implicit codes, are limited by the state's current priorities.

The dominant media discourse is one in which men and women speak in a unanimous voice. This is due to the omnipresence of actors who support the government's grip on power. They make use of several arguments to justify their oversight over the discourse: The commitment of the state to international law, the compliance with national economic interests, and the ethical principle and good will, considered a gift by the ruling class to women for which they must be grateful.

Women's rights are composed of references made to and principles inspired by international conventions and charters such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Copenhagen Convention on Civil and Political Rights as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This means that the arguments put forth by the defenders of the government's position are biased and certainly misleading. International law does include rights for women. But these are always relegated to the back seat. The promotion of economic interests and the adherence of the discourse to the national guidelines dictate priorities and thereby take precedence over human rights discourses. WSIS is another opportunity for the feminist arm of civil society to try and make the government take responsibility. The second phase of WSIS, taking place in Tunis, needs to be approached as a milestone for the advancement of women's communication rights.

Media are not innocent but need to be understood as frontline actors of the dominant retrograde discourse. As mere echoes of power, the newspapers are only interested in fostering unanimity. They try to persuade the reader of the official discourse's benefit and portray it as the discourse of the entire society. This is done through a state media discourse that obstructs information incompatible with the interests of the regime. The dominant media orientation that ensues is dangerous for democracy and women. It displaces the debate about women's rights – and the means needed to reinforce them within a wider debate – and instead celebrates the rights women already enjoy. In times of independence, this media orientation reinforces the official discourse's legitimacy. It is seen as the only valuable voice and therefore creates a very difficult situation, in which those in power use women's rights and international commitments with multiple reservations.

Even though ATFD activists, among other civil rights organizations, frequently denounce the dominant discourse channelled by the mass media, the systematic sidelining of women continues unhampered. In particular, television programmes have the habit of marginalizing women. They present them in a way that confines them to retrograde and archaic stereotypes.

The promotion of a positive image of women in media and the instating of an egalitarian and just society still encounter many obstacles. Particularly to be denounced is the precarious situation to which freedoms such as the freedom of the press and unhampered access to information through Internet are reduced in Tunisia. The image of women can only be valued with the establishment of an effective democracy, in which the access of women activists to media is not systematically curtailed.

The discourse an organization such as ATFD adopts is rejected by the mainstream discourse because it supports the national democratic movement's convictions. It proposes an alternative that works in favour of citizen rights and combats the existing social problems. This discourse is denigrated and presented as the negative side of the coin by the promoters of the state discourse.

### **The place of women in the “information society”**

Many obstacles prevent women from occupying more than a marginal place in the Tunisian society. We consider that the participation of women in the information and knowledge society runs into a number of “invisible” socio-cultural obstacles and sexist prejudices. These barriers to entry into the public discourse define informa-



tion and communication technologies (ICTs) as a masculine prerogative. This definition is implicit and internalized by many women as a belief and has repercussions on their relationship with ICTs. These women consequently make only limited use of their skills and abilities and do not increase their knowledge of technological tools.

If women do have the chance to access ICTs, they hardly have enough time to profit from them. This is the case because even if access is provided, we still need to recognise that computer training, Internet browsing and text writing are time-consuming activities. This is especially problematical for those whose time is already monopolized by bread-and-butter tasks: housework, family responsibilities and, in some cases, wage work.

Moreover, the access and use of ICTs presuppose a high educational level that includes precise language skills – at least French and English. Now, if we only consider Arab countries, one in two women is illiterate. It is not difficult to conclude that

this constitutes an almost insurmountable handicap to a wider use of ICTs at present. As a consequence, access to ICTs remains limited to an elite of urban and literate women, often committed to preserving the *status quo* from which they personally benefit.

This situation unequivocally reflects women's limited capacity to produce digital contents that will express their preoccupations and needs on the Internet. Various reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank (WB) point out that the proportion of women in Arab countries using ICTs does not exceed 20%. This is a low average compared to the 40% of European women that use ICTs.

The democratic women's movement demands access of women to free and autonomous media, as well as to new ICTs. This will be a fundamental condition for the future. It will determine whether or not democratic women will be in a position to further and sustain the struggle for the recognition and implementation of women's rights. If ICTs and media are tools of expression, their use by women, for women, is a unequivocal precondition for correcting the gender imbalance.

Another claim that needs to be emphasized is the immediate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the Tunisian government. In doing so, specific attention needs to be given to Section J, which deals with the question of women and media. Here again, the international obligations of our government need to be stressed. Not only locally is this point to be defended, but also during WSIS and subsequent international meetings.

The ATFD has been associated with the preparatory process of WSIS. The association has always worked in the direction of making the process meet the results expected of the Millennium Development Goals. It has been exhorting governments and the international community to recognize and treat the integration of women's rights in ICTs and the knowledge society, as well as gender equality, as a fundamental aim. All members of our association see the fair participation of women in the decision-making process catalysing the Information Society as an unavoidable





must. Since women are agents of development, they need to take active part in defining and leading the development of the Information Society.

### **At the action level**

The ruling class believes that what it has done for the advancement of women's rights is enough. It promulgates laws and considers that these laws protect women and guarantee their physical and moral integrity. This deliberate attitude turns a blind eye to the violence which women continue to suffer and denies the existence of all forms of discrimination that women are faced with.

As an example, our non-governmental organization (NGO) cannot promote its activities concerning women who are victims of violence. ATFD wants to denounce the violence and discrimination publicly, in order to at least make the public opinion sensitive to, and aware of, these problems. The circulation of this information can trigger a form of consciousness in the population that makes it clear that violence is not a private matter but rather of common political concern. Knowledge about attacks on human rights, including women's rights, can encourage citizens to take action. Conversely, censorship of the media often prevents larger social movements and coalitions to take collective action if frequent attacks do not get reported.

In order to have our own share of power, we need to promote information exchange. Only in this way can we contribute to the transformation of our society and translate reality according to different points of view. We then need to combine all points of view in order to get a sense of reality in all its complexity. This will help question the value of the actual development model.

### **ICTs and women: An opportunity or a hindrance?**

The place of women in the Information Society is determined by the place that women are willing to take. The basic right to freely receive and distribute information is included in the UDHR. But if we consider that in the future – after the WSIS process – the commercial rights related to ICTs will be expanded, we can foresee that the migration of information and services towards the Internet will risk deteriorating women's access and deepen their exclusion. Worse, women might not be able to access information and services since our region will be excluded from major ICT developments.

In fact, if we want to seriously answer the question of whether the use of ICTs constitutes an opportunity or a hindrance to women's development, we need to assess the exact use made of them by women. In many cases, an opportunity can fast become a hindrance. When ICTs are integrated in a just way and employed in a manner that explicitly takes into account the component of gender equality in global development strategies, women can really reap benefits and opportunities from ICTs, from the point of view of both governor and citizen.

Without persistent gender consciousness, ICTs are fast incorporated into globalization and thereby become the focus of economic and financial interests of multinationals. At the level of NGOs, the experience with ICTs shows that the participation of women in civil society can be encouraged and multiplied. The role of women is to fully participate in economic development. With the advent of the information and knowledge society, in Tunisia and elsewhere, the place of women is at the steering wheel of media and ICTs, alongside men.





## II. Multi-stakeholder processes and civil society





## Civil society organizations beyond WSIS: Roles and potential of a “young” stakeholder

Claudia Padovani

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process might be considered as an important advance in a new territory: that of global diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This diplomacy needs to take into consideration the challenges of contemporary political processes, which are characterized, among other aspects, by the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for political mobilization and by the emergence of non-governmental actors on the world scene.

From the UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (December 2001), which officially called for the summit, to the documents adopted in the Geneva phase (Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action), to the drafts of the Implementation Plan discussed in the months before Tunis, an evolving discourse concerning civil society organizations' (CSOs) participation in the WSIS process and its follow-up has been consolidated in an official formula: that of the “multi-stakeholder approach” (MSA).

The idea is not new, as we have seen from the late 1990s onwards a growing recognition of civil society (CS) entities as meaningful partners and reflections on the ways and means of their involvement in global processes. Nevertheless, WSIS carries the responsibility of having explicitly placed this challenge on the official agenda and having developed a discourse which is amongst the unexpected and most interesting results of the summit itself. From a generic invitation to “take part” and “contribute” to the process, this discourse went to affirming the need for “new forms of solidarity, partnership and cooperation among governments and other stakeholders ... (who) should work together ... (and who) have an important function and responsibility in the development of the Information Society and, as appropriate, in decision making processes” (Geneva Declaration of Principles, paras. 17, 20).

Furthermore, WSIS has been a field of practical application, involving formal procedures and informal dialogues as well as innovative mechanisms developed through cooperation among different stakeholders. The practice has yielded both successful and frustrating outcomes, and the function envisioned for CSOs in the official language remains vague and marginal. In the Geneva Plan of Action, we read: “The commitment and involvement of civil society is equally important in creating an equitable information society” (para. 3.c). But we barely find any reference as to “how” this equally important function should be played.

It is important to stress that there is no agreed upon definition of multi-stakeholder processes and partnerships in the literature. These can take different forms, develop at different levels, tackle very different issues and aim at obtaining different outcomes. Concurrently, in spite of the many efforts carried out in the context of the WSIS process, such as official events, academic seminars, roundtables and discussions, our analysis of WSIS documents clearly shows that the “visions” of multi-stakeholder processes developed by the actors involved differ quite a lot. A range of positions seems to emerge, from a vision that stresses the centrality of governments

in international politics to aspirations towards equal and participatory decision-making processes.

### **Civil society organizations fostering democratic practice**

Is it possible to identify a specific role for CSOs in multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)? Does the nature and structure of different CSOs imply different functions to be played in international settings? What are the strategies they follow? How can their objectives become consistent with the multi-stakeholder approach, and eventually contribute to shaping it? How should issues of legitimization and representation be handled in this “new diplomacy” and in participatory governance in general? Finally, is this mainly a matter of procedures or does it have anything to do with democracy?

In order to foster a better understanding of the potential of CSOs’ participation in multi-stakeholder processes in the future, I believe it can be useful to read and assess the WSIS process through a special lens: that of placing the experience of CSOs in the broader context of global mobilization dynamics, their functions and their overall meaning for ongoing attempts to democratize the political space at all levels, including the global. After laying out some theoretical considerations to this effect, I will apply these to a few relevant examples from the WSIS experience.

The growing literature on transnational social movements and global governance identifies a number of functions performed by CSOs, such as placing issues on the agenda, making information public, monitoring institutional action and lobbying for specific strategies to be adopted. Broadening the scope of reflection, I suggest that the ultimate reason for CSOs to become involved in global (and multi-stakeholder) processes – independently from specific topics, settings and issues – is to strengthen the democratic dimension of such processes. Here, I am not naively suggesting that we can aspire to a fully democratic international system, nor do I think that most groups from CS identify this as their main goal. What I believe is that emerging practices and discourses can contribute to steer the present system, which is suffering from a widely recognized crisis of consensus and legitimization, toward a path in which reference to transparency, openness, responsibility, accountability and effectiveness is not just rhetoric.<sup>1</sup>

If we adopt a concept of democracy that goes beyond procedural considerations such as representation and voting, and if we also take into consideration substantial aspects (human rights and needs) and the results of political decisions, we can think of democratic processes as an exercise of public reasoning. This exercise presupposes the possibility for citizens to participate in public debates and influence choices of public interest. Adopting this perspective, we see CSOs involved in WSIS and focusing on information and communication issues, not just as one sector of the broader global CS, but as a crucial segment of that constituency. It is crucial because it deals precisely with guaranteeing the preconditions for CS entities to express

1 Among CSOs acting on the international scene, there is a diffuse awareness of the centrality of this challenge, as demonstrated by the declaration adopted by civil society in Geneva, entitled *Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs*, which explicitly and strongly refers to the need, and manner, to democratize global processes as part of the effort of building people-oriented and inclusive information and communication societies.

themselves, to have access to information, and to be able to use communication resources to participate in global debates.

### **Assessing civil society participation**

Referring to the five elements I have indicated as central to democratic practice – transparency, openness, responsibility, accountability and effectiveness – we see that they are interdependent and indivisible, and should be fostered in a context that is respectful of the rule of law. Transparency means that “decisions are taken and their enforcement is done in a manner that follows the rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely made available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions...” (www.unescap.org). Access to clear and appropriate information, in terms of both content and process, is crucial for the general public and for specific groups in order to foster awareness and discussion, just as it is crucial for the media to perform their mediating function for society at large. Transparency is also a precondition for openness. Openness refers to the participatory dimension which follows from access to information and makes access to deliberation and to decision-making processes possible. Those who have stakes in decisions should not just be considered as beneficiaries but rather be involved on the basis of their expertise, their awareness of needs and priorities, and their willingness and motivation to identify problems, discuss solutions, make decisions and implement plans and strategies. It is thanks to their direct knowledge that policies can be adopted which are more responsive to people’s needs. CSOs have a part to play not just by being directly involved but also by promoting a wider involvement of interested subjects. Awareness and engagement of a variety of actors are preconditions for holding authorities and other stakeholders accountable for their decisions and actions through ongoing discussions and monitoring activities. Monitoring, combined with direct knowledge, skills and expertise, allows for more coherent and efficient implementation in order to respond to societal exigencies through the best use of available resources.

These five aspects need therefore to be brought into play by a number of functions and activities, which are performed by different actors, including CSOs. Civil society organizations can (and in fact do) perform functions that enhance the way in which global processes are made transparent to the public (informative/publicity role); they promote openness through adopting and fostering participatory practices (inclusive/participatory function); they foster the responsiveness of global processes to human needs and aspirations (agenda orienting function); they call for all actors involved to be accountable to those who will be the ultimate beneficiaries of the decisions taken (evaluation/watchdog function); and they can make a difference in guaranteeing the effectiveness of the process as well as of implementation plans (coordinating/action function). Furthermore, we can identify some transversal functions such as monitoring, which is relevant to all dimensions; and transversal activities, such as lobbying, which has also proven to be relevant at different stages of political processes to meet different goals.

It should always be stressed that global CS is a complex reality, composed of structured international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as professional associations, loose coalitions and networks as well as grassroots groups, some of which are more progressive than others. Therefore, CS cannot be conceived as a



single actor, speaking with a single voice and developing unified positions. In fact, its diversity and plurality is a central feature and one of its main resources as a global actor. Being an articulate constituency, CS can also adopt highly diversified strategies in performing its functions: From education, persuasion and cooperation to confrontation. Therefore, when referring to CSOs as stakeholders, the diversity of internal organization, communication patterns, strategies and complementary roles should be taken into consideration.

Moreover, we should not underestimate the fact that CSOs involved in global events perform the role of “betweenness” which we have witnessed clearly in the WSIS experience. On the one side, they engage with official processes and aim at expanding the agenda, thus fostering issues of public relevance. On the other side, they contribute to making these processes more “public” by sharing information outside of the official spaces, thus creating a broader awareness. CSOs act simultaneously inwardly, within the process, and outwardly, towards the broader public. Finally, they need to organize themselves to be able to do so and thus develop their own communication channels and functional structures, characterized by an ongoing self-reflective exchange.

Thus, a quite precise framework for the analysis and evaluation of CSOs’ activity emerges. I propose this framework as an attempt to conceptually reduce the complexity of multi-stakeholder processes. It is a point of entry, inevitably schematic, but hopefully useful to grasp the relevance of CSOs’ participation at WSIS through the examples offered below. The proposed framework can be schematized as shown in the table on pages 42-43. Applying this framework offers the opportunity to start from a reflection on CSOs’ activities and modes of organization within a specific process like WSIS to gain insights for the broader context of global (communication) governance and WSIS follow-up.

### **WSIS in perspective**

I shall proceed by analyzing a few examples: Firstly, the constitution and functioning of the Civil Society Bureau (CSB); secondly, the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) and thirdly, the adoption of a parallel declaration by the CS sector at the end of phase one. These examples allow a better understanding of “multi-stakeholderism at WSIS” and will be briefly addressed by focusing on CSOs’ functions, in order to identify some of the challenges for effective multi-stakeholder practice. But it is important to keep in mind that it is often not the single case but the simultaneous presence of different processes (and functions, and strategies) that gives meaning to a complex reality and allows CSOs to move “from input to impact.”

Firstly, the example of the CSB: This entity was set up during PrepCom-2 of the Geneva phase, upon request of the Bureau of Governments and through the mediating role of the CS Secretariat in order to respond to a specific need: the need to identify a single interlocutor to facilitate exchange between governments and the CS sector. In the same way as the CS sector was “forced” to organize itself into working structures with agreed upon functions and responsibilities in order to be effective, the official processes manifested the need for a communication channel that would guarantee coordination and information exchange. Reactions from the side of CSOs were varied. Some welcomed the request as an unprecedented opportunity in the history of UN conferences. Others opposed the attempt as an effort to “domesticate”

the CS sector according to a governmental logic. The latter felt that the request reflected the nonrecognition of the fact that CSOs had their own structures, the most representative of which was the Plenary.

The discussion led to an agreement within the CS sector, based on a separation of functions to be performed. The CSB would be in charge of negotiating access and speaking slots whereas the Plenary and the Content and Theme Group (C&T) would maintain their roles, respectively decision-making and content production. This strategic distinction was not clear to governmental delegates, most of whom just saw the CSB as a body “speaking on behalf” of the CS sector. This illustrates one of the challenges of multi-stakeholderism: The different languages, logics and political cultures that enter the scene when different actors are involved pose problems of reciprocal understanding and the need to go beyond formal structures in order to develop effective dialogues. Efforts are crucial to create preconditions for true communication and the sharing of expectations. Ultimately, CS “families” represented in the CSB have reproduced the variegated reality of the CS sector. Some families were consistent working groups, some were mainly formal nominations, still others were based on the specific interests of only few individuals.

Overall, the CSB has proven to be a relatively effective communication channel. Its transparency of functions has been fostered through reports to the Plenary mailing list by the most committed individuals, but these have not been widely discussed. Substantive issues, including requests for resources to support CSOs to participate, have been addressed with little success. Ultimately, the CSB should receive some recognition mainly for the fact of having been the first experiment of this kind in the history of UN summits, that is, a formal attempt to legitimize multi-actor dialogues through official structures.

Secondly, the example of the WGIG: In contrast to the CSB, the WGIG was not the result of an informal learning process, but a formal choice made in Geneva. The need to further reflect on the controversial issue of Internet governance led governments to decide to set up a specific working group “in an open and inclusive process ... (to ensure) full and effective participation” of all stakeholders (Declaration of Principles para. 50). In distinction from the other group set up in Geneva (the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms to reduce the digital divide), the WGIG has actually been, according to CS people directly involved, a tripartite experience with equal representation of sectors and speaking opportunities. It has encouraged a positive dialogue among stakeholders, all of them legitimized by their competence and capacity.

CSOs have therefore played different functions in and through WGIG. Inwardly, they have contributed substantially through writing, analysis and sharing of knowledge. Outwardly, they have publicized the debate, created awareness of the issues and emerging positions, and involved other people in the discussion, both at the international and national levels. This inclusive climate seems to have been favoured by the sincere commitment of the person in charge of the group, Mr. Kummer, and of other participants. Here again, we witness the importance of informal aspects, as well as of the commitment of individuals, in defining the nature of an open process. The wording in the official documents, calling for the establishment of that group, was no guarantee that an inclusive process would take place. Nevertheless, such formal recognition supported the conviction of those who had the primary responsibility for the process. Notwithstanding shortcomings and constraints, not least the

**Table 1 – CSOs functions and activities in an international political process:  
A democratic reform framework – examples from WSIS**

| Elements of democratic practice | Functions performed by CSOs          | Inward – toward process (I)<br>Outward – toward outside (O)<br>Getting organized as a sector in the process (Org) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |  |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
|                                 |                                      |                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |  |
| Transparency                    | Informative & monitoring             | In                                                                                                                | • Developing/dissemination of knowledge + attract attention of elites + demand for publicity of documents, decisions, positions + demand for appropriate communication channels                                                                                               |  |
|                                 |                                      | Out                                                                                                               | • Developing/dissemination of knowledge + attract attention of public + provide political information                                                                                                                                                                         |  |
|                                 |                                      | Org                                                                                                               | • Developing/dissemination of knowledge + set up appropriate/plural communication channels                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| Openness                        | Inclusive Participation & monitoring | In                                                                                                                | • Demand/lobby for measures and mechanisms to insure broader participation + promote institutional chance + maintain continuous communication channels                                                                                                                        |  |
|                                 |                                      | Out                                                                                                               | • Strengthen skills of citizenship to broaden participation + give voice to different perspectives + build consensus around frames, problems, solutions + link common interest of people across national boundaries + offer alternative solutions/develop alternative visions |  |
|                                 |                                      | Org                                                                                                               | • Strengthen skills to participate + give voice to different perspectives + build consensus around issues, process, working norms + develop/negotiate/lobby for mechanisms for input into process                                                                             |  |
| Responsiveness                  | Agenda setting & monitoring          | In                                                                                                                | • Framing of issues + attempts to orientate agenda + expand political space of discourse + promote institutional chance + negotiating/setting standards + channel inputs into process + lobbying                                                                              |  |
|                                 |                                      | Out                                                                                                               | • Framing of issues + foster public debate + build consensus on issues/alternatives + sustain public attention                                                                                                                                                                |  |
|                                 |                                      | Org                                                                                                               | • Collective framing of issues/development of positions + build consensus on non-negotiables + develop/negotiate mechanisms for input into process                                                                                                                            |  |
| Accountability                  | Evaluation & monitoring              | In                                                                                                                | • Watchdog + promote institutional change + put pressure on institutions /actors to commit and maintain commitment + lobbying                                                                                                                                                 |  |
|                                 |                                      | Out                                                                                                               | • Foster public debate + sustain public attention + organize/conducting/reporting monitoring and evaluation activities                                                                                                                                                        |  |
|                                 |                                      | Org                                                                                                               | • Monitor and discuss activities from inside official process + dissemination of results from monitoring + adopt positions on basis of monitoring + develop/suggest mechanisms for better accountability of process and follow-ups                                            |  |
| Effectiveness                   | Coordination Implement. & monitoring | In                                                                                                                | • Participate in implementation + input on implementation conduct + organize resources towards implementation + mobilize support towards implementation + coordinate among different CS actors + provide interface between more formal elements of politics                   |  |
|                                 |                                      | Out                                                                                                               | • Sustain attention/circulate information about implementation + coordinate for implementation + monitoring and info strategies                                                                                                                                               |  |
|                                 |                                      | Org                                                                                                               | • Guarantee continuity/consistency in approach + maintain communication channels + set up mechanisms for monitoring implementation + dissemination of results from monitoring                                                                                                 |  |

|  | Examples from WSIS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Strategies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|  | Education                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Persuasion                                                                                                 | Cooperation                                                                  | Confrontation                                                                                |
|  | • Participation in national delegations + requests to access all documents on ITU website + requests for sustained dialogue opportunities (formal and informal)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                            |                                                                              | Statements to denounce shortcomings in process and output                                    |
|  | • Set up of various civil society websites + set up of CS platforms + websites + publications in different countries + outreach efforts towards mainstream media/press conferences/press releases                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Joint organization, participation in events/seminars outside WSIS                                          |                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|  | • Set up of mailing lists, working groups, caucuses (www.wsis-cs.org) + definition of agreed upon norms and principles for functioning of lists and working groups + definition of working structures functions (Plenary, Content & Theme, caucuses, press committee, etc)                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|  | • Informal meetings with supportive government delegates to foster CS participation/foster productive dialogue (e.g. EU delegation)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Role of Congo and NGL – liaison to official process + Set up of Civil Society Bureau                       |                                                                              | Statements to denounce failure to meet expectations risen by Res 56/183                      |
|  | • Outreach to national/regional groups + involvement of outside groups in drafting documents/contributions to official documents + organization of events around WSIS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Contacts with national delegations + multi-stakeholder national platforms                                  |                                                                              | Civil Society Declaration                                                                    |
|  | • Updating/revision of mailing lists, working groups, caucuses + revision of agreed upon norms and principles for functioning of lists and working groups + organization of seminars to develop skills (at the beginning of PrepComs and summit) + ongoing discussion spaces (Plenary and various lists, websites, wsis-online) + ad hoc meetings/discussion spaces (thematic events organized during PrepComs and summit) |                                                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | CS caucuses and WG's inputs to documents + Contacts with official representatives and friendly delegations | Participation in formal and informal thematic meeting                        | Document on Non-negotiable themes for CS + Civil Society Declaration + analysis input/impact |
|  | Update of websites & meetings of national and regional platforms                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|  | • Development of positions on specific content issues within thematic/regional working groups and caucuses + set up of mechanisms for collective elaboration of documents/framing of issues/proposals for input into official documents - Content and Theme group (C&T) + negotiation on names/order of intervention for working groups input at official plenaries by CS Plenary                                          |                                                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Contacts with official representatives of WSIS process and friendly delegations                            | Inputs on identification of mechanisms for more inclusive practice           | Call for commitment and demonstration of political will in CS Declaration                    |
|  | Update of websites & meetings of national and regional platforms                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|  | • Development of positions on process conduct discussed/adopted by Plenary Assembly + Critical analysis of process developed by CS Sector members circulated in CS lists and websites                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                                              |
|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Inputs to draft for Implementation Plan + Participation in GFC open meetings                               | Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG)                                  |                                                                                              |
|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                            | First steps in organizing to set up monitoring mechanisms for implementation |                                                                                              |
|  | Working Group on Working Mechanisms (WGWM)<br>Ongoing discussions on CS mailing lists                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                            |                                                                              |                                                                                              |

fact that the WGIG was a consultative and not a decision making body, WGIG can be considered one of the experiences within WSIS that has shown the way towards effective multi-stakeholder processes.

Thirdly, the last example: that of the declaration adopted by the CS sector at the end of the Geneva phase. This declaration illustrates a different possible outcome in multi-actor processes. It shows how a process which does not live up to the expectations it raises, be it in terms of dialogue, involvement, reorientation of agenda, and shared responsibilities, can end up with stakeholders consolidating alternative and confrontational positions. The CS sector only started to elaborate an alternative document in the final stages of the Geneva phase, when it became clear that some of the relevant issues CSOs wanted to put on the agenda were not taken into consideration. These issues included a true centrality of human rights and social justice in the Information Society, the relevance of community media, and the role of research and open access to knowledge. At this late stage, it was decided to draft a document which was no longer a contribution to the official debate, after sustained efforts in this direction, but was meant to highlight the essentials of a CS perspective on the future of knowledge societies.

It was not an easy exercise to compile inputs from different working groups, to reach consensus on wording, to articulate a discourse that could offer a vision of what “should be done” and not just of what “could be done.” Activities undertaken by CSOs in this exercise centered on broadening participation, building consensus on frames and issues, linking national and global constituencies, offering alternative solutions, sustaining public attention, coordinating communication, and making inclusive use of information technologies. In these efforts, the CSOs played a number of the functions mentioned above. With relation to the official process, it is relevant to mention that this was the only non-governmental document adopted as part of the official process outcomes at the closing ceremony in Geneva, later publicized as such on the official International Telecommunication Union (ITU) website. This is a result which we can read in terms of an inward confrontational strategy, aimed at unmasking the shortcoming of the official rhetoric, but at the same time as part of an external educational strategy which is ongoing in different contexts and at different levels.

### **Challenges and opportunities for the future**

To conclude, we can identify a number of opportunities and challenges that have emerged from the WSIS experience. An in-depth articulation of these is certainly needed; may it suffice here to mention them as a way of contributing to an ongoing debate. In terms of opportunities, we can say that multi-stakeholder dialogues can certainly help tackle complex issues, allowing different kinds of knowledge and competencies for the discussion and elaboration of appropriate solutions. Dialogues among subjects who express different interests can contribute to more effective policy-making, as effective implementation and shared responsibility requires a common understanding of the way issues have been framed and solutions have been identified. Multi-stakeholder processes take place at different levels and involve different actors and therefore offer flexible mechanisms. Flexibility can be conceived as a resource, but it also requires an understanding of connections between formal and informal processes.

If we now turn to the challenges, it is crucial to remember that different logics, languages and political cultures meet when different stakeholders share the same political arena. The very concept of “stakeholders,” their nature and their functioning, is often ambiguous, as it refers to constituencies which are highly differentiated within themselves. This issue relates to another problematic aspect: the need to revise our understanding of legitimacy and representativeness. As far as legitimacy is concerned, the practice within WSIS has confirmed the conviction that it is the competence and expertise of actors that should support their legitimate participation. Representativity issues remain still very open and call for innovative thinking and creative mechanisms. One of the most controversial issues for a sincere adoption of the MSA is the very meaning of “participation” in political processes, which can (and in fact does) mean very different things to different stakeholders. It has become obvious that, between consultation and decision-making, there is a wide array of possible “participatory degrees.” Finally, there is a “power dimension,” which has to do with the different resources of the actors involved, such as status, relevant knowledge, time, financial support and necessary skills to be involved in highly formalized processes.

As far as the role of CSOs is concerned, I suggest that promoting multi-stakeholder processes in the follow-up of the WSIS experience, and in political processes in general, requires recognizing their specific nature and ultimate goal. This would take us back to the proposed framework, and it would entail the following:

1. An effort to build capacities for dialogue among all stakeholders, thus fostering transparency, information sharing and communication.
2. An effort to set conditions aimed at facilitating reciprocal “recognition,” promoting openness and participation through clear rules, shared agreements and appropriate settings.
3. A focus on creating opportunities for stakeholders to go beyond their respective understanding towards reorientating their goals on the basis of shared values, thus fostering responsiveness of action.
4. An effort to define throughout the process clear and shared responsibilities, thus supporting the accountability of actors and of processes.
5. A focus on possible strategic cooperation in order to make the process and its outcomes more effective.

WSIS has shown positive and negative outcomes in these regards, yet it remains an interesting laboratory. Learning from past experiences, CSOs have already generated a great deal of self-reflective analysis of the meaning and modes of their engagement in international politics and are now aware that they can meaningfully contribute in the future. It is perhaps time to start discussing the potential and challenges of multi-stakeholderism in a truly multi-stakeholder manner.

## **Civil society in the carousel: Who wins, who loses and who is forgotten by the multi-stakeholder approach?**

Beatriz Busaniche

Global governance is under discussion. The new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the digital revolution have a profound impact on political debate all over the world. This gives rise to a new set of problems, but also to new and often surprising solutions. In particular, it promotes global debates and opens the door for different, newly emerging actors of the networked and knowledge-driven society.

There is a series of themes that clearly need to be approached globally, problems that almost equally affect the North and the South, developed and developing countries, rich and poor. In spite of distances, there are issues that affect humanity as a whole. Included among these are advances in genetic engineering which modify our nutritional habits as well as the human condition, environmental risks and climate change, problems related to the privatization of water and the enclosure of knowledge. These changes have profound socio-political, economic and ethical impacts, which in our world resonate deeper than the differences between the North and the South. Issues related to ICTs and particularly to the privatization of knowledge through copyright and patent monopolies are part of this new set of global themes. These are issues that require urgent debate at the global level and require the participation of actors that are involved and committed.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is the first forum which officially works under the umbrella of a multi-stakeholder partnership (MSP). As a first experience, we need to face it up front in order to develop a critical analysis, a crucial step before accepting this model as an example of “good practices.”

The many optimistic analyses notwithstanding, it is important to ask what the consequences and the risks of this supposedly new model of global democracy are. As one of the principal outcomes of WSIS, the idea of multi-stakeholderism has already started to be promoted as an alternative that should be extended to other forums. This promotion should not be occurring prior to finding responses to the following crucial questions: Who are the “stakeholders?” Who do they “represent?” What are the hidden interests behind the debates? And especially: What is the meaning of “civil society” in this context? Under the prevalent conditions, is the multi-stakeholder approach an opportunity or a pitfall?

The experience drawn from the WSIS process leads us to undertake an essential critical analysis and invites us to think about global democracy, today and in the future. It especially asks us to think about a concept that has been absent throughout the duration of this process: The concept of “citizen,” at times a forgotten protagonist, but indispensable in all democratic processes.

### **Who's who?**

When observing the WSIS process, we are bound to ask who's who. The multi-stakeholder scheme is based on a trilateral foundation that assembles:

1. Governments: The usual players in international processes of this nature. Governments are those who formally “represent” the citizenry of their respective countries.
2. Private sector: A role almost exclusively played by big corporations, which have historically been involved in this type of process and which can now rely on a strong lobbying capacity and experience. Corporations have gone public on a global level in United Nations processes, as well as on local levels. They have a strong capacity to influence national and local governments.
3. Civil society: The brand new actor which is made up of an immense network of potentially interested parties.

When participation in the “civil society bureau” (CSB) began, some organizations proposed a non-exhaustive list of what, in their view, sums up civil society (CS): non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the academic sector, organized labour, First Nations Peoples, the disabled, local governments, etc. But what exactly is civil society? In WSIS, civil society is nothing other than the sum of formal and legally recognized organizations. Even if there is some talk about disabled people, the academic sector, First Nations Peoples or labour unions, no citizen who belongs to any one of these groups can concretely participate, as long as he/she does not prove – beyond any doubt – his/her institutional affiliation. This means that political action is automatically mediated: Only the person who – in one way or another – belongs to an institution is allowed to participate. A forced incorporation must take place for anyone wanting to have a voice in the process.

The participation of the private sector – the other great actor in the MSP – appears much more compact and straightforward. Businesses represent their own interests directly. They also come together into what is called the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI). This nucleus, however, excludes a large fraction of the private sector, such as, for example, the small and medium-sized enterprises who do not have a voice in these negotiations.

“Civil society” is “represented” by a layer of NGOs, and in many cases also governmental ones, as in the examples of state universities and local governments’ delegates. This confronts us with a new layer of inter-mediation in citizen participation. The layer does not rely on any official mechanism that could generate the self-proclaimed representativity. For instance, it might be useful to point out that the massive associations that represent the most important media corporations are taking part in the process as “civil society.”

It is also worth noting that many NGOs are directly or indirectly subjected to the influence of corporations and governments that financially support their work. At this point, one might want to ask how it is even possible to participate in events that require not only time, but steady flows of money. This triggers the question of who facilitates the participation in this type of action. Additionally, organizations need to rely on policy-making specialists who are trained in the matter and are capable of pushing forward agendas at international forums of this nature.

### **Who represents whom?**

The problem of representation is central to the debates. While representative democracies are protagonists of profound political crises – especially in Latin America – the



dilemma of representativity remains open. In the wake of international processes, it might seem obvious to say that governments are the only ones that possess formal “representativity” with regard to the citizenry. Nonetheless, as global debates indicate, profound differences often distance governmental decisions from the demands and needs expressed by the people who they are supposed to represent.

In this line of thought, citizen action is necessarily deprived of a vehicle to represent its concerns. Citizen action often translates into actions carried out by social movements, some of which become institutionalized in the form of NGOs. But this is not necessarily so. NGOs are not the only ones capable of channeling citizen action. What is important to keep in mind here is that organizations cannot pretend to be “representative” in the classic sense of the term. They do not have mechanisms that would allow for such political exercise.

This is exactly where the structure of CS participation in WSIS ran into one of its core problems. Many wanted to see the CSB adopting a “representative” format. This body is now far from being in a position to claim even a small degree of representativity. The CSB is composed of a delegate from each “family” and each region. It has failed in its aim to represent CS, simply because it does not include mechanisms that make it an effective body for the democratic participation of the citizenry.

The CSB is nothing more than a body of delegates from organizations selected at small meetings, with a small participation base. The majority of these delegates unfortunately does not represent anything more than highly bureaucratized organizations of CS. Thus, representativity is not exactly one of the attributes that defines the CSB.

### **Increasing civil society's bureaucracy**

One of the undesired consequences of WSIS is the increasing bureaucracy which looms over CS. The idea of making CS participation more effective and streamlined has implied participation structures that suppress its main attribute: diversity. CS has to interact in some kind of organized way with the classical bureaucratic processes that are intrinsic to international organizations. But the direct consequence of this strategy is a strong concentration of voices ending up in the hands of a limited number of organizations. These organizations are the ones that truly possess the capacity to occupy strategic positions and to keep actors involved in the process.

Discussions concerning procedure and structure have by far outnumbered discussions about content. In the majority of cases, the actors who joined the WSIS process spent more time trying to understand participation procedure than effectively voicing their concerns at the negotiation table. Despite the fact that the structuring of CS was one of the most popular themes in the process, nobody clearly questioned the problematic nature and the consequences of an increased and centralized CS bureaucracy.

The first notable consequence was the delay that many experienced in understanding the procedures. It left those entering the process unprepared to face the wave of activities of the preparatory meetings, not to mention the summit itself. Understanding the mechanisms became so complex that before each and every preparatory event, an explanatory meeting became the rule. Every new actor joining the process had to deal with the prior challenge of understanding how participation of CS in its different structures is configured. Only those who followed the process

religiously (and since the beginning) could understand the methodology. Thereby, these groups benefited from strong advantages when the time came to present documents and to publicly raise their voices in the name of “civil society.”

The second consequence is the unification of the “non-unified.” If there is one thing that is characteristic of the so-called CS, it is the level of diversity and the impossibility for all to unite under a single heading. Diversity, divergence and even the contradictions in interests present in CS are such that the ideal of unification under a single body is impossible. We could say that it is pretentious to want only one voice to come out of that body. Limiting CS’s diversity is cutting it off from one of the attributes that strengthens its political action.

The third consequence comes from the intention to unify CS in a “representative” body. Basically, what happens when trying to unify the “non-unified,” is that the toughest negotiations of the process are transposed to the very heart of CS. The actors involved use up an enormous amount of resources and energies only in trying to present and defend their arguments, in the hope of making it into the official documents of CS. Parallel to this, negotiations with the rest of the “stakeholders” go unnoticed. The frame of negotiation deliberately contributes to a weakening of the most combative sectors. Any “consensus” document between multiple interests is bound to be a watered-down document that covers a wide range of positions acceptable to all signatories. In political negotiations in which the voices of CS need to be spoken out in a firm, strong and clear way, being lukewarm is not a particularly desirable attribute.

### **A lukewarm voice, a functional voice**

Discussions related to procedures and content are key to the process. While the negotiations concerning procedures captured the attention of all participants, the negotiations about content were – in most cases – dealt with by a small editorial group, responsible for unifying the discourse of the participating CS.

It is also important to understand that the discussion over procedures is fundamental, since the mode of organization often determines the outcomes in terms of content. Simply put, the mode of organization conditioned not only the access to WSIS information, but also the distribution of people and organizations in strategic locations.

One example of how the structure and the organization of CS has had a major influence on the content and political actions that have been produced is the selection of CS delegates who were to form the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG). Out of ten CS members, at least three represented the same organization, while several delegates were admitted even though they normally should have entered as part of the private sector. The selection process of the WGIG is without any doubt one of the clearest examples of the hidden pitfalls of the MSP model.

The perspectives underlying WGIG’s work and the documents coming out of this working group are an obvious example illustrating the fact that a lukewarm CS is functional in serving the interests of corporations and some governments. This being said, there is no other way of getting inside these forums, except by learning how to negotiate politically. This again is a preemptive step that guarantees that only the actors of CS able to negotiate certain principles will be the ones reaching these places of power.

But what is worse is that the participation of CS actors in these spaces tends to legitimize governmental and corporate positions, in that it contributes to an image of pretended “democratization” of negotiations. In the end, governments succeed in propagating a system that does not work, or that works improperly and for which they do not take responsibility. Instead of a real change, the proposed model resembles a patchwork designed to support the *status quo*, as well as the transfer of responsibilities of states and international organizations towards the third sector. Those who should normally represent the people – governments – seem to have abandoned their duty of implementing citizens’ wills. Many CS groups have emerged, trying to cope with situations that in fact require unconditional action on the part of governments. Apart from the fact that governments pretend to represent the will of the people, these groups do not have the capacity to replace states. Social organizations cannot represent anything other than the sum of a limited set of particular interests. They cannot govern, they cannot collect taxes and they do not share the responsibility of carrying out public policies. Governments do not have the right to shy away from their mandates, relegating the representation of citizen will to NGOs. It is up to governments to listen to the peoples they represent.

Coming back to the WSIS process, it is worth noting that the doors to the process are open to a CS with a lukewarm discourse. This is positive for those who celebrate and are thankful for the simple fact of being there. Nonetheless, being there is not a positive thing in itself if in order to be present, one is forced to negotiate the non-negotiable. The procedures directly condition the contents, the selection of voices conditions the discourse, and the form conditions the essence. The most serious problem lies in the fact that while enormous resources are invested in the discussion of form, its contents remain relegated to the work of few pens and voices.

The search for unity among the non-unified translates automatically into a negotiation of what for many is non-negotiable. The effort needed to find a consensual compromise carries with it the consequence of a weakening of positions. This results in a single voice, not only univocal, but also lukewarm, and in that sense, functional. This sets a precedent because from now on, governments and corporations will be able to say that they invited CS to participate in global processes and that the doors have been opened for its actors to express themselves. In this sense, we fell into the trap.

### **Propositions and opportunities**

While I voice harsh criticism – especially with regard to the first phase of WSIS which ended in Geneva, Switzerland, in December of 2003 – one cannot but appreciate the opportunities that have opened up. One must further elaborate propositions in order for the experiences criticized herein to be transformed into opportunities for action.

For the social organizations that have been involved in the global discussions related to ICTs, one of the most valuable opportunities enabled by WSIS is the mutual recognition and networking with other actors working on the same themes. WSIS constituted a unique forum for learning, meeting and building bridges. It has been important to the formation of networks and alliances among organizations and people interested in discussing the themes at a global level. While only a few participants officially play a relevant role and monopolize the voice of CS involved in the

process, other actors use the opportunity to establish links, open up channels of dialogue and generate collaboration networks with people and organizations. Without the establishment of WSIS, the access to other groups and individuals would not have been realized.

Nonetheless, we are left with the weight of having to respond to those who for a particular reason insist that participation is in itself functional and who thus provide legitimacy to a process that on its own terms does not represent the interests of the citizenry. Here, we obviously need to go back to the beginning and try to address the question of "citizenry." My proposal towards democratizing these processes is rooted in the construction of a citizenry and in the reawakening of this concept. How can a citizen participate in these global processes? How can we build up citizenry?

By citizenry, we do not refer to the mere and simple status conferred to someone by a passport. What is meant is the exercise of rights and responsibilities, a concept much greater than only belonging to a nation. We consider the exercise and the construction of citizenry as one of the only alternatives that we can still hold on to. We live in a world in which the population is increasingly being dispossessed and in which immense and immoral divides between rich and poor are created. The construction of citizenry opens up new opportunities for resistance to the onslaught against our rights. It is in the exercise of our responsibilities as citizens that answers can be found. We will not find a solution in the bureaucratization of citizenry, but rather in the coordination of multiple and combined action and participation strategies. Whatever attempt is made to unify the diverse and to give it a single voice will push the citizenry into a new form of corporatization, one which will have the effect of being easily co-opted and even manipulated. CS participation in WSIS embraced the opportunity to enter through the open doors of negotiation and lost sight of its leading force: multiplicity and diversity. Instead, it presented a lukewarm voice, centralized around a few organizations. This experience must serve as a lesson and motivation in the search for new alternatives of citizen construction and participation in processes of global negotiation that affect each and every one of us.

As the initial steps towards the resolution of the dilemma of whether to enter or stay away from the debates, we propose four principles:

1. The organizations of CS that participate should not pretend to be representing anyone except their own organizations. They should publicly state what their interests and political principles are.
2. Citizenry should be the base of participation. No other representation or organization should mediate. The participation in a specific organization should not be an obligation.
3. Processes of participation need to be straightforward, less centralized, more inclusive and more democratic. They should facilitate the access to information and avoid bureaucratic obstacles that tend to intimidate those who wish to raise their voice and exercise their inalienable right to participate.
4. Governments cannot shy away from representing the will of citizens. When the citizenry expresses itself, governments do not have the right not to listen. The presence of citizens in the process can also serve as a way to control and monitor what our official delegates are doing there.

Citizen involvement in global negotiations that affect us all is imperative. WSIS is a first experience from which we need to extract fundamental lessons. Only then can a model be extrapolated to other forums. Being present, just for the sake of being there, is not in itself desirable. Being present in order to open the doors to the multiple and diverse voices of the citizenry should be the primary objective of our participation. Our governments are responsible for representing us. This is why it is imperative to be in the field, observing what our delegates are doing and insisting on an authentic and concrete representation of the interests of our peoples. Building citizenry is the answer. Let us put it at the heart of our action.

# Gender equality and the multi-stakeholder approach: WSIS as best practice?

Heike Jensen

Civil society (CS) is a heterogeneous political actor, or rather a conglomeration of heterogeneous political actors sharing a structural position in a political process. Therefore, CS assessments of the challenges and opportunities encountered in WSIS will share some common points, but beyond that will differ very much regarding the respective political agenda of the CS entities involved, and of course also regarding the personal experiences of their representatives in this very complex process. In what follows, I will develop an assessment of WSIS and its multi-stakeholder approach (MSA) from the point of view of gender equality advocacy. This perspective offers the advantage of inviting a substantial historical perspective, given that women's organizations and feminists of what is now termed CS have been among the pioneers of international collaboration as well as of CS engagements at UN summits.

Since "transnational female mobilization has helped lay the foundations of global civil society over the past century,"<sup>1</sup> one of the most pressing questions we currently need to answer is how women's rights advocates are faring now that CS has a recognized structural hold in a summit process due to the MSA. Does WSIS suggest that we are making strides in the direction of global governance as a more gender-sensitive and gender-equal undertaking? The answer is not easy and needs to reflect on many different facets of the matter. Among these are:

- The overall political, economic and social climate in which the summit has been situated.
- The agenda of the summit.
- The nature of MSAs and their relation to gender advocacy.
- The specific MSA in WSIS gender advocacy.
- The scope and aims of feminist advocacy and its results at the summit.
- The indirect influence of feminists on the understanding of issues and norms in different stakeholder groups, which may have developed on the summit plane as well as on regional, national or local planes.

Of course, the effect that all of the above facets will have in terms of implementation and change in the direction of women's empowerment and gender equality can only be assessed in years to come. In this article, I will undertake an initial assessment of the utility of the MSA for gender equality advocacy.

## The global "climate"

To begin with a brief assessment of the overall political, economic and social climate in which WSIS has been situated, I would like to draw on the recent findings of the Beijing+10 review of February/March 2005. This review assessed the status of

1 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, ed. *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*. France, 2005: 174.

women and girls around the world ten years after the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing, China, and consequently ten years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action comprehensively mapped the problems faced by women and girls and issued far-reaching calls to remedy this situation. The principal finding of the review was that despite many distinct gains for women and girls, for instance concerning their status before the law and their access to formal education, there seems to be an overall lack of political will to work for gender equality, coupled with a lack of financial resources allocated to this end.

In fact, the situation of girls and women has become more precarious in many regards, both relating to an overall decline in whole regions such as Eastern Europe and relating to specific issues the world over, for instance trafficking in women and girls and their forced prostitution, and rising religious and market-economy fundamentalisms and their negative impact on more progressive gender role arrangements and women's autonomy. Given these findings, many women's rights advocates assess the overall political, economic and social climate as largely indifferent at best and hostile at worst to their aims. In such a climate, the overarching feminist goals are rather to safeguard the political gains made so far and to prevent a backsliding than to boldly tackle new issues and develop new utopias.

### **The WSIS agenda**

The WSIS agenda has centered on information and communication technologies (ICTs) in their political and economic dimensions. With reference to their political dimensions, the most prominent issues have been those of Internet governance (IG) and human rights versus national security and sovereignty. Regarding the economic dimension, the prime issues have been the digital divide and how to bridge it, intellectual property rights (IPRs), and proprietary software versus free and open source software. Issues of these kinds have traditionally been tackled within male power bastions into which women have so far hardly made any inroads at all on the level of decision-making. In WSIS, this state of affairs has for instance been reflected with regard to the kinds of national ministries that have been entrusted with the negotiations, such as economic and telecommunications ministries.

On the level of participation, the result has been a clear predominance of men in the delegations that have undertaken the negotiations. On a substantive level, it is safe to assume that many of the delegates have so far not been accustomed to taking gender equality squarely into consideration in their negotiations.<sup>2</sup> This state of affairs also illustrates that the mandate of gender mainstreaming, which was issued in Beijing in 1995 and has subsequently been adopted by many countries in their national legislation, has not yet become a reality: Gender mainstreaming would call for a consideration of the potential impact of political decisions and plans on female and male constituencies, so that these decisions and plans can be made in a way which contributes to the goals of gender equality and social balancing.

Given the political WSIS agenda, it needs to be remarked that a lack of previous involvement with gender matters and a lack of commitment to gender equality has

2 It is easy to imagine that if the summit had been politically classified as concerning the Information Society as a social and cultural utopia instead of a technological, economic and political battle ground, the agenda and demarcation of issues as well as the involved ministries and delegations would have been quite different.

not only characterized the contributions of most delegates, but also those of most CS organizations and representatives working in the WSIS context. In this respect, WSIS is of course widely different from UN world conferences on women, where the majority of CS and large groups of governmental delegates were committed to women's empowerment. From a gender perspective, it is hence crucial to remark that both gender-sensitivity and gender-insensitivity can be found in all stakeholder groups. This, of course, has specific implications for the possibility of multi-stakeholder alliances, which can explicitly or implicitly form around either gender equality goals or hegemonic patriarchal setups.

### **MSAs in gender advocacy**

In the field of progressive gender politics and women's advancement, many international organizations including suborganizations of the UN, many task forces, women's ministries and other political representatives and administrators have worked hand in hand with CS organizations and representatives for many years. In fact, these organizations, task forces and ministries rely on strong CS voices in order to defend their gender equality mission, budget and programs on a continuous basis. This is not to say that these entities and the gender equality advocates rooted in CS always see eye to eye. But it is to say that gender equality is one political field in which collaboration between international organizational entities, politicians, administrators and CS representatives has been essential for survival and action on all sides. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that there are segments of the feminist community that have refrained from collaborations of these kinds. Reasons for this stance may be the wish to remain "autonomous" and to retain the possibility to develop structures that do not fit collaboration requirements, or to develop fundamental feminist critiques that target or include the political apparatus and its frames of reference.

The role of business as the third potential stakeholder in gender equality alliances is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises run by women has been a central feminist goal to empower women economically, socially and personally. Business groups or organizations that encourage such developments are hence clear allies for progressive gender politics. On the other hand, big transnational corporations and their increasingly complicated chains of outsourced production and services often have a track record of ruthlessly exploiting the female labor force, and in particular in regions and contexts where women have the least possibilities to learn about and safeguard their rights as workers. The organizations representing these transnational corporations are therefore not allies in the struggle for gender equality.

### **The MSA in WSIS gender advocacy**

In WSIS, the fact that a commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment transcends stakeholder lines and unites the respective feminist minority groups across the stakeholder groups has been clearly visible. It has even found an institutional expression in the shape of the WSIS Gender Caucus: This caucus is a multi-stakeholder group, which has carried out lobbying for gender equality throughout the whole WSIS process. Its multi-stakeholder setup is one central feature that differentiates the WSIS Gender Caucus from almost all other caucuses and working



groups in WSIS, which are largely organized as CS groups. Another decisive feature that sets the WSIS Gender Caucus apart from these other entities is that it is funded: The funding comes from the Nordic countries (Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Agency for International Development Cooperation) and UNIFEM. The latter invited the formation of the WSIS Gender Caucus at the African regional preparatory conference for WSIS in Bamako, Mali, in May 2002.<sup>3</sup>

In the first phase of WSIS, a second gender advocacy group worked alongside the WSIS Gender Caucus: the NGO Gender Strategies Working Group (NGO GSWG). As the name implies, this was a CS alliance. It was formed at the first WSIS Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) Meeting in Geneva in July 2002, and its initial members were FEMNET, *Agencia Latino Americana de Información*, Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP), International Women's Tribune Centre, and Isis International-Manila. These organizations are well-established feminist NGO players in the field of media and ICTs. However, after strong involvement in WSIS for one and a half years up until the Geneva summit, they decided to de-prioritize the summit and redirect their financial and other resources elsewhere.

In some respects, it is true that the presence of the NGO GSWG was particularly decisive during the first phase. The group was instrumental in linking up with the other CS constituencies, because, as explained above, these were as a rule not gender-conscious and needed to be sensitized with regard to gender issues. Also, NGO GSWG members contributed the gender paragraphs to the Geneva Civil Society Declaration *Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs*, a task which by definition could not have been performed by a multi-stakeholder group, such as the WSIS Gender Caucus. But the second WSIS phase has been politically decisive for other reasons, notably because it has addressed the most contested political issues, i.e. IG and financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide, which could not be resolved until the Geneva summit.

Shaping the IG debate and future structures of IG, and assuring that the gender digital divide as the most salient feature of the digital divide is tackled, are important feminist concerns. Thus to de-prioritize WSIS in the second phase appears politically dangerous. Yet CS participation has noticeably slackened across the board, a development which can often be traced to growing material constraints evoked by this prolonged political process. As it stands, the remaining forces from the NGO GSWG have joined the WSIS Gender Caucus in order to bundle resources, and it is safe to assume that without the WSIS Gender Caucus and its funding, feminist lobbying would be quite weak at this point in the negotiations.

The issue of resources and funding is an important point to consider beyond WSIS in its relevance for feminist CS involvement in political processes: It is often

3 The founding members include ABANTU for Development; ACWICT; African Connection Programme; AIS-GWG; AMARC-WIN; AMARC Africa; APC Africa Women's Programme; AQ Solutions Association of YAM-Bukri; ENDA; GEEP; FEMNET; MISA; NDIMA; Network of African Women Economists; UNDP/SURF West Africa; UNIFEM; *Unite d'appui au programme de la cooperation Canada-Mali*; WomensNet(SA); WOUGNET; ZWRCN; and Zimbabwe Ministry of Transport and Communications.

argued that CS involvement in global governance and in MSAs on different levels offers women the possibility to become political actors at last, in that it circumvents the institutional barriers that women have faced when trying to enter the established political institutions, particularly on the international level. And there is some evidence for this argument, for instance judging by the high number of extremely qualified CS women who have been prominent in WSIS in many different capacities including, but by no means limited to, the one of gender equality advocate. However, given that the feminization of poverty is growing worldwide, the question of who can afford to enter the political terrain as a CS representative, and for how long, will likely not be decided in favor of women, at least not for the majority of women who do not, or no longer, belong to privileged social classes.

### **Aims of feminist advocacy in WSIS and extent of achievement**

Given the global climate, the WSIS agenda and the non-feminist approach of the majority in each stakeholder group as outlined above, the central aim of feminist advocacy in WSIS has been the moderate one of gaining a commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. After a long struggle during the first phase, this was achieved in the form of paragraph 12 of the Geneva Declaration of Principles, which states:

"We affirm that development of ICTs provides enormous opportunities for women, who should be an integral part of, and key actors, in the Information Society. We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis on (sic) equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. To this end, we should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICTs as a tool to that end."

Gender equality advocates have concurrently sought backing for such a statement by a reaffirmation of crucial international documents such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). However, this aim could not be achieved, and this lack of historical depth concerning the international community's commitment to women's rights is deplorable. Similarly, it has been impossible to mainstream a gender equality perspective throughout the political discussions and documents. Yet some further gender equality points could be gained: Another important success is that the Geneva Plan of Action contains a call for gender-sensitive indicators on both "ICT use and needs," which is decisive for implementation and monitoring. Quoted in full, the sentence states that "Gender-specific indicators on ICT use and needs should be developed, and measurable performance indicators should be identified to assess the impact of funded ICT projects on the lives of women and girls." (para. E28.d)

This provision, useful as it will be to enable future assessments, also illustrates that gender in WSIS has generally been conflated with women and girls and specific measures on their behalf. This conflation is also prevalent in other paragraphs contained in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action on gender and/or women and girls, which have been gained through feminist lobbying. These provisions mostly center on improved opportunities for the female population concerning learning and training as well as jobs and careers (Declaration of Principles para. 29, Plan of Action paras. C4.11.g; C6.13.l; C7.19.a + c + d; C8.23.h).

The fact that the WSIS documents do not address gender as a relational category that refers to masculinities and men as well as to femininities and women is not, however, a negative outcome of the political negotiations: Feminist lobbying in WSIS has followed the established path of not really touching upon men as a problematic gender group whose development needs to be carefully engineered in relation to that of women. On one level, this omission can be understood as a realistic approach to what feminism can achieve in a political setting such as WSIS and in an overall political climate of defending previous feminist gains rather than augmenting them.

But this omission also needs to be considered in relation to the gender research that has been brought together in the context of WSIS. This research has been conducted inside and outside the UN. It has been brought together in online discussions and preparatory meetings for WSIS, for example those undertaken by

INSTRAW and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in 2002. And it has been commissioned by member organizations of the NGO GSWG and by the WSIS Gender Caucus, which has awarded research grants. The vast majority of this research has been dedicated to bringing women and their practical as well as strategic gender concerns into focus. This has for instance happened by analyzing good practice examples involving women, media and ICTs and explaining how these projects have succeeded in strengthening women. Or it has happened by analyzing gender-blind policies and contexts and illustrating how these by default work to the detriment of many women.

This research has consequently answered the need to map women's positions and women's media and ICT issues in many different regions and contexts, thus making visible the constituency that has mostly been ignored in media and ICT development and policy-making. Yet in so doing, this body of research has by and large not availed itself of the insights that Gender Studies have

made available concerning how gender arrangements have been perpetuated and negotiated among different groups of men and women. Therefore, the forms of power play and status negotiations among men, in which women may or may not be involved, have not been taken into account. A direct consequence of this theoretical omission in the research is that the feminist advocacy that has arisen from it and has been backed by it is lacking important perspectives and demands with reference to gender relations and male gender roles.

Another shortcoming of feminist positioning and research needs to be attested in thematic areas that have become crucial in WSIS, such as IPR, IG and national security and surveillance. In these areas, even the stakes for women, not to mention those for gender relations, have only just begun to be analyzed. The same is true for



broader frameworks such as human rights or development paradigms in the Information Society. However, while it is important to identify these gaps or nascent areas in feminist theorizing and lobbying, there is no reason to assume that feminist sophistication in these fields would have led to more satisfactory political outcomes in WSIS. Rather, it is to be presumed that well-established fields of feminist lobbying, most notably education and career opportunities for girls and women, but also the media-related “all-time-favorite” of non-stereotyped depictions, are easier to promote than comparatively new fields of feminist intervention. This thesis can arguably be bolstered with reference to the issue of women-friendly infrastructure development and regulation. It constitutes a comparatively new area of feminist research and intervention, which has been debated by gender equality advocates on the international level for a few years. And it has been completely ignored in WSIS.

In a nutshell, since gender equality advocates have been almost entirely unable to set the political WSIS agenda, it comes as no surprise that the items that they have been able to “squeeze” into the official documents appear marginal and address well-established women’s issues from equally well-established political angles. In this respect, WSIS is part and parcel of the constraining political climate which many women worldwide feel increasingly embattled by. Yet the gender-sensitive research and lobbying has created its own momentum, even if it has only been experienced by a small group of political actors and has found only limited expression in the outcome documents of WSIS.

### **Indirect achievements of feminist advocacy**

WSIS, media and ICT issues currently do not figure prominently on the global agenda of women’s movements. Only a comparatively small segment of these movements deals with these issues, so that sustained resource allocation and political pressure relating to them is lacking. To stress the point made above, a lack of resources compromises the political power of the actors and their sophistication in tackling certain issues, irrespective of the political framework and how much it in theory facilitates their access.

In response to the widespread lack of engagement and participation by women’s movements and NGOs in media and ICT issues, the WSIS Gender Caucus has during the second WSIS phase prioritized regional activities aimed at strengthening individuals, groups and networks that already address these issues as well as at promoting the issues beyond these entities. While these activities will not make themselves felt in the final weeks leading up to the Tunis summit, it is hoped that they will have a positive bearing on WSIS implementation by building an understanding of the issues and an interest in influencing implementation in a gender-equitable way at the regional and subregional levels.

In addition, the organizations that worked together in the NGO GSWG have similarly promoted media and ICT issues in their networks and the larger feminist communities. This outreach approach was also employed by the WSIS Gender Caucus and the NGO GSWG at the Geneva summit, where both entities and their member organizations showcased gender material in the exhibition space and coordinated a substantial number of panel discussions and other events to promote gender perspectives for the Information Society.

## Conclusion

The achievements of gender equality work in the context of WSIS are considerable. Regarding the WSIS outcome documents, they consist in an affirmation of women's empowerment in the Information Society and women's equal participation with men in shaping this society, as well as in a commitment to special measures for girls and women and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation of the developments. Concerning research, they consist in a substantial broadening of the knowledge base about women, media and ICTs. With reference to outreach, they encompass a strengthening and affirmation of feminist networks, organizations and individuals that have been working in the media and ICT area. And in terms of publicity, they include an advertising of media, ICTs and the Information Society as a fruitful area of gender equality interventions to a wider public.

These results appear particularly significant in light of the fact that the WSIS process has taken place in a period in which the overall political climate is experienced as moderately indifferent or chillingly resistant by many gender equality advocates. In such a climate, there is a tendency to rather defend previous gender equality gains than boldly take on new challenges, such as the Information Society. The WSIS agenda and its preoccupation with male power structures and economic gains, as well as many delegates' lack of a basic understanding of how to mainstream a gender perspective and how to define political issues from a gender equality standpoint, has been part of this climate. Thus WSIS has constituted a difficult terrain for gender equality advocacy.

Fortunately, after decades of feminist networking and lobbying, hegemonic patriarchal forces are far from monolithic, and each stakeholder group, be it government, business or CS, includes at least a minority that is dedicated to gender equality. While it could be argued that the MSA in general favors the gender-blind, hegemonic majority by facilitating implicitly homosocial and patriarchal alliances, it still also offers an effective context to create synergies between the gender-sensitive minority groups in each stakeholder group, as it has in the past regarding other feminist undertakings. WSIS, however, is different insofar as it has required a lot of ground-work in the form of research and capacity building to tackle the many new ICT issues that have not been sufficiently mapped and addressed by feminists up until now. To close these gaps, forge ahead and generate interest in these matters from a gender equality perspective, a substantial amount of resources has been required.

CS organizations on their own can at times mobilize quite some resources and volunteer engagement, as illustrated by the NGO GSWG in the first WSIS phase. But a sustained push is required to establish an area such as the Information Society as a flourishing area of feminist research, political lobbying and outreach to social and political actors on all planes. In my view, the WSIS Gender Caucus and its continuing funding have been vital in this respect. While the funding has been decisive in sustaining the holistic approach to gender equality work in all respects as described above, the MSA has facilitated access to potential partners in all stakeholder groups.

The MSA on its own, uncoupled from any funding earmarked for gender equality work, would arguably not have gone far, precisely because of the extensive ground-work required to take on new political challenges, compared with the limited resources that gender equality advocates can earmark for these tasks at present. Hence the MSA as such is not necessarily a step in the direction of a more demo-

cratic and gender-equal form of global governance. All other things being equal, it favors the representation of issues that best fit the agenda of those in power and the participation of those constituencies and individuals that have the necessary funds at their disposal and are hence in a privileged position to begin with. Yet coupling the MSA with funding earmarked for gender equality as a holistic undertaking, spanning lobbying and advocacy, research and outreach, as undertaken by the WSIS Gender Caucus, can qualify as a best practice model.

# The Working Group on Internet Governance: A feminist conversation

Karen Banks, Jacqueline Morris, Avri Doria

*Karen Banks interviews Jacqueline Morris and Avri Doria about their experiences and insights into the struggle to put women's rights and gender issues on the agenda of Internet governance (IG), which is by many considered to be a most impenetrable and abstract area relating to information and communication technologies (ICTs). The interview questions were developed in collaboration with the Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP).*

## Introduction by Karen Banks

Avri, Jacqueline and myself formed one half of the total number of women on the forty member Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG). It is understandable that the first reaction many have to this statistic is that gender representation on the WGIG was pretty disappointing. However, having been involved in the formulation of the criteria that came to be used to select members of the WGIG, I know that every effort was made to be as inclusive of women in the WGIG nomination and selection process as possible. So why did we end up with the meager figure of 15% representation?

And of those six women, were we all advocating gender and women's rights issues throughout the process? Should we have been? Is it incumbent on every woman to carry the burden of addressing all policy issues, as well as ensuring that each and every one incorporates a sensitivity that guarantees that women and men can enjoy the outcomes equally?

As a gender and women's rights advocate working in the area of ICTs, and with a solid technical basis, I would say for myself that this is certainly the case. That it is incumbent on those of us who have the capacity, the confidence, the expertise and access to the networks, to do everything we can to encourage women to get involved in processes that impact on our ability to self-determine our livelihoods and well-being, build gender sensitivity into public policy processes and encourage our colleagues, both men and women, who have access to decision-making processes, to acknowledge the different needs of women and men in any ensuing policies.

What this means, of course, is that women like myself, Jacqueline and Avri, were expected somewhat to carry the multiple burdens of being civil society activists, media and ICT technologists and practitioners, gender and women's rights activists and often heavily involved drafters and organizers of a process that was, and continues to be, dominated by nation-state politics, power battles and an overwhelming preoccupation with an economic market-led agenda. This expectation is not surprising, and for those of us who consider ourselves women's rights activists, our intention was certainly to do our best to respond to those expectations.

However, as Jacqueline and Avri's comments reveal, the reality of the process, the preoccupation with management of the logical infrastructure (management of Internet protocol names and numbers) and dissatisfaction with the *status quo* regarding the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and its contractual relationship with the US Department of Commerce, left little space to deal with almost any other issue with the same rigor.

It is interesting that civil society members of the WGIG, of which women comprised a far healthier percentage (about 25%), were successful in ensuring that development objectives, human rights, capacity building and the crucial importance of involving civil society, men and women, as peers in any future spaces and processes, were central outcomes of the WGIG. On reflection, the women who participated in the WGIG had an impact on the process and its outcome that was significantly inversely proportionate to their representation.

Although the WGIG report may well disappoint gender and women's rights activists on first reading, I believe that significant interest has been generated at least amongst the women's media and ICT movement. Awareness has been raised, questions are being asked and a framework has been created that could provide at least the opportunity for women to gain a foothold in this apparently "arcane and technical" field, as Jacqueline Morris describes it. Markus Kummer, coordinator of the WGIG, noted early in the process that, "successful policies are those in which people see themselves reflected." And the only way to see yourself and your opinions reflected is to be involved.

Our work now is to continue to raise awareness, to continue to "unpack" abstract, arcane and technical issues that appear to bear little relevance to the day-to-day practical and strategic needs of women of the world, to identify those issues that are of specific concern to women, in relation to access, to content, to the perpetration of violence against women and children through ICTs, to develop positions and concrete recommendations that need to be pushed through every avenue available to us, locally, nationally, regionally and internationally.

**Karen:** *As members of the WGIG, you have participated actively in the process of defining this area and connected issues. Can you tell us a little about what IG is, and why people should be interested in it?*

**Avri:** IG is the collection of practices, both explicit and implicit, that various stakeholders use when making policy or policy-related decisions concerning the development and use of the Internet. Policies control much that goes on in the Internet, from the funding that is made available to development areas, to the technology that is developed and deployed on the network. Policies direct the assignment of resources that are allocated to different users and to different regions of the world.

In terms of development efforts, policies have a direct effect on which regions and projects get funding. In terms of regions, a certain set of policies can dictate that a certain project, for example the creation of infrastructure, can only be done using investment funds instead of aid. Since development in the area is expected to be unprofitable, the development of infrastructure cannot be completed.

In Sweden, there is a policy that 97% of the population must have ICT access. The indigenous Sámi, a semi-nomadic population of Sapmi (comprising the arctic regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola peninsula in Russia), do not have access to any ICTs, including telephone, for six months of the year. Yet they are considered connected because during the winter months they reside in towns that have ICT access. Because they have this partial access, they cannot obtain funding to create an appropriate infrastructure in the areas they inhabit while following their herds. The policies and practices in this case are interfering with efforts to bring



equal advantages to this population. In Africa, there are regional policy barriers that prevent countries from interconnecting to national broadband infrastructures. In fact, in some countries, there are even policy barriers to interconnecting the “dark fiber” within the country.

From a gender perspective, funding models used by funding agencies often involve systematic discrimination against women. Some models of funding, e.g. focusing funding on telecenters and other public areas which are male-controlled, exclude women’s access and increase the economic disparity between men and women in those development areas.

**Jacqueline:** We have not yet been able to move past the concept of IG as an arcane and technical topic. This has been one of the major problems with getting people involved. I have seen this in the general population, concerning both women and men.

The Internet is shaping up to be the new underlying communications and transport mechanism. More and more, products are being converted to digital format and disseminated via this mechanism. Access to this infrastructure is vital for economic development and success. Policies determine access to funding, access to infrastructure, to training and capacity building. If communities do not get engaged with national, regional and international IG regimes, their issues will not be reflected in policies and therefore, these policies will not be beneficial to the communities.

The definition of IG that the WGIG developed is very high-level. But we need practical applications and ideas to bring it home to people – why they should care about IG and why they should pay attention to it. The best way to interest people in IG is to show them where their interests intersect with policies that are developed in their name, but may not be beneficial to them.

**Avri:** The reasons I care about governance and the ensuing policy is that policy, as much as technology, defines the possibilities for change. And unfortunately, policy often defines the barriers for development.

**Karen:** *Do you see any parallels between critical issues for women as identified in the Beijing Platform for Action – such as violence against women, economic empowerment, political participation – and IG? How can IG principles and mechanisms strengthen women’s rights?*

**Avri:** I certainly see parallels. The main purpose behind the WSIS process and the WGIG discussions on governance relate to the achievement of economic empowerment, including the empowerment of women. While the process is mostly focused on goals that include women within a mainstreamed context, they are part of the context. It is a limitation of the process, I believe, that the critical issues for women are barely visible, being mentioned in reports but rarely constituting the focus of the work. Yet I believe that women’s issues, especially empowerment and political participation, can be advanced by policies that take these issues into account. Partly, this requires involvement in the process and the constant effort to include consideration of these issues, even if the effort sometimes ends up with just a token result.

**Jacqueline:** The Internet is an essential tool to be used in dealing with all of these issues. Internet infrastructure is as vital to development issues as is access to education, water and electricity. Access to the Internet will allow women’s groups and advocates to communicate, disseminate information, network, build communities,

share practices, etc. Women's participation in the development of the policies and procedures relating to IG will allow for their values and issues to be considered at the high level of IG, as well as provide them with experience and legitimacy in these processes.

**Karen:** *With regard to the public policy issues identified in the final WGIG report, e.g. Internet connection costs, privacy rights, intellectual property rights (IPRs), and capacity-building, what do you think is missing regarding gender in the report? And why do you think those issues did not make it in?*

**Avri:** I think a specific discussion of how policies may differ when they relate to women would produce policy recommendations that could improve things. This was never taken up in the discussions. Part of the reason was the large amount of time the group needed to spend on sovereignty issues and naming and numbering (the ICANN versus ITU issue). And part of it related to the number of mainstream issues that dominated the discussion. In the context of the WGIG, it was a challenge to bring the discussion to the point where we could focus on specific populations, including women.

**Jacqueline:** Gender was addressed in the WGIG report, and in our discussions, as a cross-cutting issue, but gender was not mainstreamed into discussions. We should have discussed how every single one of these issues impact women, but found that we did not have the time to focus on cross-cutting issues, as so much time was spent on the politics of Internet management.

**Avri:** Another difficulty concerned the makeup of the group. With approximately a third of the group coming from the political sector, many of whom come from countries where the full range of women's rights is contested rather than protected, it was diplomatically difficult to engage in detailed discussions without deviating from the task.

**Jacqueline:** Yes, the makeup of the group was problematic. The majority of the members were not gender-sensitized in the larger context.

**Karen:** *There appears to be a wide consensus that we need to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to IG. However the recently launched WGIG report barely recognizes women's perspectives, and there has not been much engagement from the women's movement to put gender into the agenda and language of IG. Why do you think that is? What are your personal experiences – what was it like to be one of the very few women in the WGIG? What do you think the barriers are to women's rights advocates' participation in such processes?*

**Jacqueline:** The principle of multi-stakeholderism highlighted by the WGIG is important, as it legitimizes the input of civil society. Governments are not the only stakeholders in this area, and the governments of the nation-states have come about in a particular environment. As the environment is changing, we need to change with it and allow for voices to be heard that are not represented by official government positions. There are communities that are global and virtual, whose agendas are more pertinent to many of us than the ones of governments of the nation-states. Women's rights are often global or trans-border in nature, and the application of the multi-stakeholder mechanism in more global policy areas will be beneficial to the movement. It was difficult to integrate gender issues in the report as so much of the discussion was based on the technical aspects of running and managing the

Internet, leaving little space for gender issues to be raised. It is interesting that having women on the group did not guarantee that gender issues would be considered important. Women on the group were from different areas and had different foci. Gender was not always the overriding issue.

With regard to the lack of involvement of women's rights/gender advocates, their focus is more on practical issues that address poor women and rural women, etc. Such issues could have found a place in discussions around the "development" cluster of issues, which were not seen to be so technical, but were also not seen as being urgent or high priority. However, while these are valid and needed areas of focus, we cannot continue to concentrate purely on lifting the most disadvantaged to the basic level. If so, we will continue to play "catch up" at the more advanced levels. We need to focus on both the high-level issues and the more basic issues.

**Avri:** I think that while women's issues are critical, there are many issues of general need that have to be dealt with and that consume the discussion.

**Jacqueline:** As a woman working in the Internet space for many years, it was not different being one of very few women on the WGIG, as I have become accustomed to being in that situation. I do applaud the efforts of Markus Kummer to get more representation, but a major problem is the fact that there are few women in the ICT career pipeline. Twenty years ago, when I studied engineering, there were more women coming up. Recently, this trend seems to have reversed, and there seem to be now even fewer women in Engineering studies in Trinidad and Tobago than when I started. Also, the women who are still in the tech fields are not very active in many of these volunteer areas. In talking to some of my old classmates, I have found a major issue for them is time-management, as they are raising children while working in very time-demanding positions. There are only a few of us who do not have those responsibilities, or whose jobs allow for involvement with the international and national issues.

**Karen:** *IG is mainly discussed at the global level. How can local women's interests and concerns be better integrated/embedded into public policy discussions on IG?*

**Avri:** The issues of governance need to be discussed at national and local levels as well. WSIS and the WGIG are, by definition, global efforts. While they can point to discussions that need to be held at the more local levels, they cannot actually hold those conversations – though some of the regional meetings have been attempts to open the local discussion. I think it is only by constant activism, both in the meetings and outside the meetings, that an insistence on discussion and inclusion of women's concerns will make it possible to include the issues. I think that relying on an integrated or an embedded effort will normally not achieve much progress for women.

**Jacqueline:** One major challenge has been the lack of capacity of women's groups to move beyond "women in development" type programmes and the delivery of such programmes and to become stronger policy advocates. While it is important to focus on the basics of women's development, it is also vital for us to focus on high-level issues such as IG, or we will continue to be left behind. It is important to find ways to convince these national, regional and grassroots organizations that IG and policy issues are equally important. In the Caribbean, the majority of women's organizations focus on domestic violence, reproductive rights, HIV, education and economic

empowerment. We need to convince them that IG is valuable to them in all of these areas. Cross-fertilization between groups advocating around the equity issues in ICTs and those working on other important gender issues like environment, HIV-AIDS, good governance, etc. would be a positive step. At all levels, we need to develop positions on all policy issues, including a gender focus, and put energy into lobbying and advocating these positions.

**Karen:** *What steps need to be taken to be able to more easily incorporate a gender perspective in IG policies on local, regional and global levels?*

**Avri:** First, I think more women need to be involved in the process. In the WGIG, we were a minority, and given the pressures of other issues, we had very little leeway in the issues we could cover. I think more work explaining the non-neutrality of technology needs to be done. While feminist theory may explain this, it is not well understood or accepted by technologists and policy makers, since neutrality has been a fundamental premise of science and technology throughout the current age. While I think it is important to get this basic notion of non-neutrality accepted into mainstream thought, care must be taken in doing so. While it should be okay to use feminist terminology in explaining these notions, this often falls on deaf ears. In other words, we need to explain the ideas using mainstream language.

**Jacqueline:** First, in the Caribbean, we need to have a local and regional IG policy! The Caribbean is only now beginning to take steps towards understanding IG issues and looking at how these issues affect us from a development perspective. As we are only now starting, it is a good opportunity for women to get in on the ground floor. A major issue is the lack of formal organizations and funding to get the word out about IG and other policy issues to the general population, and by extension to the women who may find it important to participate. ICT sensitization of gender activists is critical, as they do not have the tools to easily participate in this discussion.

**Karen:** *What are your expectations for the WSIS Tunis summit? Is it worthwhile to direct energy this way, or is it better to concentrate on the post-WSIS era? Do you have any suggestion for future strategies? Where do you think gender and ICTs should go from here? Where will the strategic spaces for dialogue be?*

**Avri:** I do not know what to expect from the Tunis summit, the complexity of competing influences is still too confusing. Given the location of the event, and the apparent zeal of the Tunisian authorities to minimize and harass the activists in women's issues, I expect that this will be an issue. It could have one of two effects. It could either sidetrack any efforts for progress in women's issues, or it could, by focusing a spotlight on some of the more egregious problems, energize the debate.

I think that while we are in the WSIS age, we should focus on achieving what we can. There will be time enough to concentrate on the post-WSIS age after WSIS. Besides, it is too early to give up on WSIS. In terms of strategic spaces, we need to watch for the forum or rather for the fora that may form in the post-WSIS era. Some of these may offer opportunities for strategic dialogue. In general, we need to find the right balance between covering the mainstream issues in so far as development in general will benefit women, and paying special attention to those cases where women's issues run counter to the mainstream.

**Jacqueline:** Tunis is an interesting issue, as the Tunisian government is not one of the most progressive with regard to ICT or gender. It may be that the summit can show this and other non-progressive governments a better way to move towards a true multi-stakeholder and inclusive process. The summit will be a major showcase and an excellent opportunity for us to promote our messages and to show that we can and should be included in the policy processes. However, the summit is simply that. The real work is in the implementation of the decisions made and agreed to at the summit. The post-WSIS era and the implementation of these high-level plans is where the rubber meets the road. This is where we really have to focus our energies, before gender becomes a nice thought and a platitude, but is effectively left out of the funding, programmes and other post-WSIS implementation processes.

The gender and ICT movement needs to work on a multi-pronged approach, where we can focus on capacity building to allow more women to be capable of participating in these processes, as well as advocating that we have the space in the policy discussions and processes. The women who are currently capable of such participation have a lot of work and responsibility, as we will need to participate as well as assist those who do not currently have the capacity. We need to work on the basic grassroots development track as well as the high-level policy and programmes. It will be very hard, but it needs to be done, otherwise we will lose the opportunity to become a permanent part of the structures being built.

## **A laboratory for new mechanisms: Volunteerism as a building block for multi-stakeholder approaches**

Viola Krebs

To many, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process has been a laboratory: Its innovative mechanisms hold the potential to serve as effective models to help shape future UN meetings and summits, as well as other processes involving multiple stakeholders. In order to realize this potential, it seems critical to step back and to evaluate the achievements of WSIS, both in terms of its success in attaining its original objectives, and its potential for structural replication elsewhere. While it is premature to draw final conclusions regarding the WSIS process, this article outlines some initial findings on the structure of the meeting and overall success in implementing its recommendations and policies.

In the second part of the article, we describe some positive results stemming from the active participation of one specific constituency, the volunteer sector. The volunteer sector first became involved in the process of WSIS in 2002, at the African Regional Conference in Bamako. Since then, volunteers and volunteer organizations have actively contributed to its preparatory process, the Geneva summit, and the Tunis phase.

We conclude that some of the lessons learned in the volunteer sector are particularly relevant to future efforts to build both effective multi-stakeholder relationships and successful partnerships. At the end of this paper, we detail the unique qualifications of volunteers to impact these processes.

### **Multi-stakeholder evaluation process as the first step to post-WSIS**

In several ways, WSIS has served as a testing ground for innovative approaches. It is the first UN summit focusing on the Information Society, a new and complex concept. Additionally, it has been a laboratory for innovative modalities of participation and input into UN processes, based on a multi-stakeholder approach (MSA), involving governments, civil society, the private sector and international organizations. It is also the first summit to be held in two phases, rather than structured as a one-phase event with follow-up meetings.

Praised by many for its inclusive approach, comments about WSIS overall have ranged from the resolutely critical to the highly optimistic. However, for this article, we will consider specifically the lessons learned from WSIS regarding multi-stakeholder mechanisms. There is much ongoing dialogue about the necessity for such processes, as governments acknowledge that they need to work with other stakeholders to deal with issues as complex as the Information Society and its transformation into a knowledge society. Considering that there is clearly work left to be done to refine a model for multi-stakeholder involvement, it seems that one of the most pressing needs is to develop a way to evaluate the quality and value of multi-stakeholder participation in WSIS.

The success of WSIS as a multi-stakeholder process can only be evaluated based on whether all stakeholders have not only been able to participate, but also feel that,

ultimately, their input has had a positive outcome and impact. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to outline specific methods for evaluating the success of the entire WSIS process from the perspective of all stakeholders, we nonetheless urge that such an evaluation be undertaken. This would necessitate the following steps:

- Documenting the process.
- Evaluating what worked and what did not, and why (from government, civil society and private sector perspectives).
- Ensuring that all conclusions are effectively communicated to all stakeholders in such a way that best assures their chances of replication.

Different mechanisms for the evaluation of WSIS and the development of good multi-stakeholder models have been proposed recently, such as the creation of a United Nations Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships Agency (<http://www.unmsp.org>). In addition, in Saint-Petersburg in May 2005, UNESCO was encouraged to create a working group focusing on multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs, <http://www.unmsp.org/DOCS/RecommendationsSectiono8-final.pdf>). If such a working group is created, it would make sense for it to lead the evaluation process of WSIS, comparing it with other UN mechanisms, drawing on existing resources, such as the Cardoso Report, to see how it can best serve as a precedent for future international meetings. The multi-stakeholder working group could act as a thinktank involved in the follow-up activities to WSIS.

Also during the Saint-Petersburg meeting, a civil society working group was launched, focusing on multi-stakeholder dialogue. This launch has the potential to be an important step, addressing a second, pressing need in the larger effort to create effective multi-stakeholder processes: It could help clearly explain to all the importance of civil society's participation in local, national and international decision-making. The new working group could allow civil society to demonstrate once more that its very role as a key actor in such political and diplomatic processes makes it a catalyst, helping new ideas find their way to the negotiating table. It could show, in other words, that civil society is a driving force in international processes such as WSIS, expressing and defending sometimes critical views, but also bringing added value, negotiating a space and occupying it well.

Multi-stakeholder follow-up mechanisms are essential to ensure that the example of WSIS is not just filed away as an innovative past event, but rather used as a building block, providing good models that lay out a clear method with which to engage the multiple entities, establishing a situation where individual stakeholders push for a MSA for their own reasons and interests.

### **WSIS: A quick assessment of what worked and what did not**

While there is no substitute for a comprehensive evaluation of WSIS from a multi-stakeholder perspective, some lessons can be drawn on a more limited basis. The following section is an attempt to reflect upon the successes and failures of WSIS from my perspective as a civil society representative, a member of the Civil Society Bureau (CSB) and focal point for the volunteer constituency.

Overall, from a process perspective, the summit can be described as a success. I would stress that this is particularly true for the first phase of WSIS, as momentum was built thanks to excellent leadership by the President of the WSIS Preparatory

Committee, HE Mr. Adama Samassékou. His leadership was driven by a vision of inclusiveness and cooperation, embracing and building on the MSA, allowing the summit to become more than just a technocratic meeting. The summit had both a strong human dimension, and an understanding that technology alone can by no means solve all the issues at hand. Instead, various actors need to come to the negotiating table and wholeheartedly engage in forging dialogue and innovative recommendations. I believe that this vision and drive to find solutions brought us from what Professor Wolfgang Kleinwächter called “turmoil” to cooperation, or even a certain degree of trust, between governments, civil society and the private sector. True, the process was not perfect. But if we consider it as a first series of baby steps, or as the fledgling attempts of a bird that is learning to fly, initial imperfections can only be considered normal. In Samassékou’s words:

“Inclusion, partnership, and solidarity are key-words which characterize the entire preparatory process of the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. The success of Geneva will have been to lay the foundations of this new society – the society of shared knowledge – characterized by real partnerships which need to be built and reinforced among the main stakeholders of the information society, a partnership based on a new spirit of cooperation, listening to the Others, and, foremost, based on an active solidarity among States, among peoples and citizens of the world, each being conscious of the interdependency between Actors.”<sup>1</sup>

So, from a civil society perspective, what are the lessons that can be learned from the whole process of WSIS? Please note that the list below contains some basic and non-exhaustive observations.

Lesson one: The bodies created to organize the participation of civil society helped streamline input. Three main bodies played such a role: 1) the Civil Society Plenary, which brought together all participants; 2) the working groups and caucuses, which focused on specific issues; and 3) the international Civil Society Bureau, which dealt with procedure. While, in the case of the latter, the mechanisms for establishing the CSB could be refined and improved, it clearly played a useful role, acting as both a facilitating body and a connector between civil society and other stakeholders. As such, it managed to establish trust with governmental interlocutors, laying the foundations for ongoing dialogue and joint Bureau-to-Bureau meetings during every Preparatory Committee meeting (PrepCom) and Intersessional gathering.

Lesson two: The opportunity for various sectors to participate as speakers is a good precedent and model. The closing event of the WSIS Geneva summit in December 2003 was the first UN closing session I attended where actors other than governments played such significant roles. This participation provided a uniquely comprehensive overview of all the various initiatives led by different actors and interest groups, which added value to the process.

Lesson three: Mechanisms can and must be regularly refined and adapted to changing needs. During its Cape Town meeting in December 2004, for example, the CSB evaluated its functioning and underwent a reform to better meet its goals.

1 Adama Samassékou, “Building dynamic partnerships among actors,” in Daniel Stauffacher, Wolfgang Kleinwächter, *The World Summit on the Information Society: Moving from the Past into the Future*, UNICT Task Force. New York, 2005.

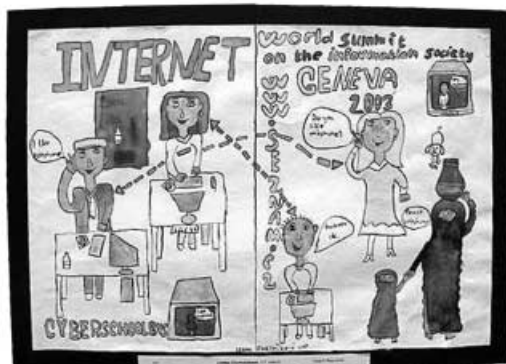


Additionally, during this meeting, an open-ended Working Group on Working Methods was launched, looking at the various mechanisms and seeing how these can not only interrelate, but also how they can constantly be refined and improved. This additional think tank was very helpful in drafting, for example, the CSB charter, a document that needs to reflect the essence of the CSB, but is best written with a fresh and outside perspective.

What about the challenges the process faced, and things which could be improved in the future? From my perspective, the MSA was not applied as systematically as it could have been in the WSIS process. The Task Force on Financial Mechanisms

(TFFM), for example, left civil society and the private sector completely on the outside. The Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), in contrast, was built as a truly multi-stakeholder body.

Furthermore, in my experience, there is a great gap between summit discussions and field realities. It seems that international talks actually have only triggered to a minor extent inclusive local-level discussions. The regional conference held in Rio de Janeiro in July



2005 provides a good example of this. As a regional WSIS conference, one might have expected it to be a multi-stakeholder event, involving national and regional constituencies. Additionally, considering the number of NGOs and open source projects in Brazil, one would anticipate substantial participation from various sectors. However, non-governmental participants were scarce, and more marginalized than in any other WSIS-related conference I have ever attended. The badges used to accredit participants were indicative of this approach: orange-marked badges were given to “governments,” who had access to all sessions. Everybody else, including civil society and private sector participants, had badges with the label “observer.” The outcome documents were negotiated behind closed doors, with only government participation. On several occasions, I heard government officials talk on behalf of civil society. All of this seems a bit surprising in a multi-stakeholder environment. There was little or no evidence that local communities had embraced any of the WSIS principles and action lines.

African regional conferences were, in my experience, substantially more inclusive of civil society than their Latin American counterparts. In Accra, in February 2005, the presence of numerous private-sector stands indicated at least some degree of interest in WSIS by this sector. In addition, African civil society has been leading the development of new mechanisms to support its regional participation in WSIS with the creation of a coordinating body called ACSIS (African Civil Society for the Information Society), including experts from various backgrounds, regions and genders.

On the other hand, there remains a great deal of work to be done to achieve greater gender balance in official sessions of regional African conferences. Of nine opening speakers of the Accra conference, for instance, only one was female. The

picture was only slightly more encouraging in the parallel sessions. This can be explained by the fact that governing bodies in Africa are largely male-dominated. However, if the human dimension of the Information Society, capacity building and knowledge sharing, is truly to be addressed, it is important to avoid excluding half the potential implementing force. We therefore need to find mechanisms to make sure women are fully included as part of the driving force for technology development and transfer. Without them, it will be difficult to bridge the digital divide and build a true knowledge society.

Regarding the implementation of the provisions endorsed in the WSIS Geneva documents, I would have hoped for some clear and major steps during the Tunis phase, encouraging and enabling initiatives such as the bottom-up campaigns launched by the Youth Caucus and the Volunteer Family. For post-WSIS, we could perhaps get some inspiration from the International Year of Volunteers (IYV 2001). This event was considered by many as a great, top-down and bottom-up implementation success story, involving millions of people at local, national and international levels. The United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV) set up a team called Team IYV. This team created basic documents, templates and tools. It then worked with national volunteer organizations, governments, UNV and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices to set up national committees. While all national and regional campaigns used the same basic objectives for the year, individual committees shaped their own structures, set up their own websites and launched their own individual initiatives. By the end of the year, there were 126 national committees: All had prepared their own campaigns, some were government-run, others completely civil society-based, while yet others contained a mixture of the two (Report of the Int. Symposium on Volunteering: [www.worldwidevolunteer.org](http://www.worldwidevolunteer.org)). While in many cases, the committees disintegrated after the year had passed, their work has led to substantial long-term improvements for the countries' volunteer sectors.

### **Lessons from the volunteer sector, and how volunteers can contribute to the multi-stakeholder approach**

Because volunteers operate to a great extent at the local level and in informal settings, their participation in UN processes as a recognized actor is relatively new. However, I believe the roles played and methods developed by volunteers offer important lessons for those seeking to design and implement effective multi-stakeholder processes. The following paragraphs aim to explain the concepts of volunteerism, and to summarize the methods for utilizing volunteers in the Information Society and how their work fits into a MSA.

In general terms, volunteers can be defined as individuals who offer their time, skills and experience to carry out a non-obligatory, non-wage activity for the well-being of their neighbors, community or society as a whole. Volunteering takes many forms, from traditional customs of mutual self-help to community responses in times of crisis and joint efforts for relief and conflict resolution.

With the creation of a WSIS Volunteer Family, a range of national and local volunteer organizations got involved in the summit. Volunteers themselves also participated, ensuring the smooth running of many aspects of the summit. The very first step for the Volunteer Family was to define the role of volunteers in the

Information Society, in terms of the activities carried out by volunteers and the partners they work with.<sup>2</sup> This was done through:

- A working group on volunteerism and information and communication technologies (ICTs) developing a thinking process and specific language related to volunteerism.
- The organization of several meetings and conferences (Brussels, Dakar, Edinburgh, Bogotá, Geneva, Stirling, Barcelona, Bamako, Brazzaville), during which many ICT volunteer projects were presented.
- The creation of an online library on “Volunteerism and Information Society” and a report *Volunteering and ICTs: Establishing the framework for action* ([www.worldwidevolunteer.org/wsis2003](http://www.worldwidevolunteer.org/wsis2003)).

WSIS participants discovered that volunteer activities held enormous potential to help make the Information Society a reality across the globe. Furthermore, it became clear that, to be most effective, volunteers would have to rely heavily on multi-stakeholder interactions and partnerships. In the Information Society, volunteers have played and continue to play a key role in the creation and development of software applications (open source software, contents development, etc.). In fact, some of the key components of the Information Society are, to a great extent, a product of volunteer effort. Well-known examples include Internet protocols and the World Wide Web itself.

Volunteers are also helping to reduce the digital divide, both within and between countries, through human capacity-building and literacy programs. They train people and help them apply specific ICTs to their particular development needs. They also raise awareness about the possibilities of these technologies (e.g. by providing outreach to local users in community telecenters).

Furthermore, volunteers can facilitate the production and dissemination of local content, enhancing the cultural and linguistic diversity of ICTs. Volunteers can help train ICT trainers, but also get training themselves by exchanging knowledge. In the context of a developing country, this increases the critical mass of qualified ICT specialists available locally, and reduces the dependency on personnel coming from abroad.

Typically, volunteers do not operate in a vacuum and are an accompanying force, working with many partners, be it civil society organizations (CSOs), local authorities or municipalities. As pointed out by HE Mr. Adama Samassékou, “Volunteers act in the spirit of a mission, which favors accompanying rather than intervention. A consultant is called on to intervene; the volunteer makes his competences and his know-how available. He shares them with others. By doing so, he commits himself to the environment in which he is operating and serves as a catalyst. The volunteer

2 Among these were ATD Quart Monde, CIVICUS (World Alliance for Citizen Participation), the European Volunteer Center (CEV), the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Netcorps-Cyberjeunes, OneWorld, and ICVolunteers (International Conference Volunteers). The latter has to date served as the focal point and secretariat of the WSIS Volunteer Family. Throughout the entire first phase of WSIS, the civil society Volunteer Family also closely collaborated with the United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV).

needs therefore to listen to people and in this way brings a community approach. He comes indeed to learn in order to serve better.”<sup>3</sup>

While volunteerism largely happens in the informal and non-profit sector, multi-actor partnerships can strengthen and enhance it. One such form is employee volunteering, building partnerships between the volunteer sector and the private sector. “Employee volunteering” or “employee engagement” may be described as the giving of employees’ time and skills to the benefit of the communities in which they operate. This is done through a three-way partnership between the employer, employee and the beneficiaries of the volunteer effort. Forms of corporate volunteering can increase the chances for youth in the labor market, as employees or even as entrepreneurs, by setting up, for example, local cybercafés. Private, public and voluntary-sector organizations constitute an enormous reserve of resources, skills and expertise, which can be called on to support local schools, communities and organizations. Businesses that support employee volunteering, on the other hand, benefit from a much improved public image, and better-skilled and motivated employees.

New forms of volunteering have emerged through the availability and use of ICTs. One such application is Online Volunteering (also referred to as e-volunteering), a new way to collaborate through the Internet, with a different continent or in one’s own city. In this way, volunteers translate documents, create Internet sites for non-profit organizations, and advise local communities through online fora and chat facilities on technical issues related to ICTs, regardless of the distance between partners, often combining onsite and online collaboration. Here again, MSPs are frequently developed and applied, involving people who are commonly excluded from the workforce, such as homebound individuals and people with disabilities.

As one of the main outcomes of the work achieved by the WSIS Volunteer Family, the Volunteer Action Plan presented in the Plenary in December 2003 is built on a multi-actor approach and designed to: (1) strengthen the contributions of volunteering to transform the Information Society into a society of shared knowledge accessible to all, and (2) improve the way in which volunteers and volunteer organizations make use of these technologies. This in itself uses a MSA to move forward, for example in the framework of programs and organizations such as:

- Geekcorps ([www.geekcorps.org](http://www.geekcorps.org))
- Netcorps (Cyberjeunes) ([www.netcorps-cyberjeunes.org](http://www.netcorps-cyberjeunes.org))
- CyberVolunteers partnership-based program ([www.cybervolunteers.info](http://www.cybervolunteers.info)).

### **Ways forward and challenges ahead of us**

The very essence of volunteerism is also the underlying human dimension and force of what we call the Information Society. The word “volunteer” comes from Latin *vol+ens*, meaning free+will. A volunteer is thus driven by his or her free will. As such, the concept of volunteerism touches on the very essence of individual motivations of human beings and groups to achieve goals. This was the recipe that made the IYV a success, and allowed the Global Polio Eradication Initiative to mobilize ten million people to vaccinate 550 million children in the year 2000. This is also what

3 Adama Samassékou, Volunteer News; First Quarter 2005, *ICVolunteers*. Geneva, Switzerland, p. 5.

drives the open source community, creators and publishers of web contents, and many others.

For volunteerism to be successful, it needs to be always based on an exchange, a multilateral relationship. In a similar way, multi-stakeholder processes and public private partnerships (PPPs) cannot succeed if they are based on unilateral principles. Because different sectors are driven by different motivations, there is the need for a more genuine understanding by each stakeholder group of what the other party expects and would like to get out of the equation. Therefore, I believe MSPs could actually draw on and benefit from some of the experiences developed in the volunteer sector and the driving force of volunteerism: Free will, the fact that one is doing something not out of obligation but individual or collective choice.

For volunteerism to actively contribute to the construction of multi-stakeholder processes, it first needs to be understood better. There is a need to acknowledge that the scope of volunteerism is much broader than is often understood and goes well beyond the common stereotype of cookie baking. Volunteerism includes social activists, open source software programmers, and others making very real impacts on social, political and economic levels. It is an essential factor in turning youths into active citizens of tomorrow, and giving retirees a place to continue making use of their skills and the knowledge acquired over a lifetime.

As to civil society, one stakeholder of MSPs, it needs to fully understand what its specific nature is and where its strengths reside. One of the strengths of civil society is that many of its constituencies are structured into networks and sometimes even networks of networks. Mobilizing networks from all around the world typically means that more people are involved than live in one single country. For civil society to participate in international negotiation processes involving multiple stakeholders, such as governments and the private sector, facilitators, accommodators and coordination mechanisms are required. Furthermore, such participation requires discipline among a group that, by nature, is very diverse.

Even if the WSIS process is still far from its end, we can already say that it has been a good testing ground for the MSA. The Information Society, and with it, globalization, have changed our ways of operating and interacting. It has given more power to individuals than they have ever had as publishers and disseminators of information. As such, national approaches are no longer sufficient, more integration and cooperation are necessary and essential. It appears, in fact, that MSAs are the only hope for a more sustainable future, where responsibility sharing seems the only solution to environmental destruction and other global issues. Also, in any global process, there needs to be a clear understanding of how to work at the governance, policy and operational levels. It is my hope that volunteerism as a concept and volunteers as human capital will be closely associated with any such process.

## **African civil society and WSIS: So far... not too far...**

Nnenna Nwakanma

### **In the African beginning...**

First, it was April 1995. There was the African Regional Symposium on Telematics Development, which brought together over three hundred experts in the field of information technology. One month later, African ministers of social and economic development met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and adopted the famous resolution on *Building Africa's Information Highway*. The consultations and brainstorming that followed the resolution gave birth to what we know today as the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), which became, and still is, the action framework to build Africa's information and communication infrastructure.

Then came the idea of a world conference on the use of information and communication technologies for development (ICTD). The origin can be traced back to Tunisia, to the Tunisian civil society. No wonder then, that the African regional preparatory meeting for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was the very first to be held. The Bamako conference brought together about 2000 participants, with delegations from 51 African countries. This conference concretized the multi-stakeholder partnership (MSP). In the spirit of the AISI, the Economic Commission for Africa hosted a civil society ICT policy consultation, which also served to get the African civil society to engage resolutely as an Information Society stakeholder.

Thus the AISI African civil society discussion list was born. This virtual plenary was just what the civil society entities needed to exchange ideas, share experiences, and learn from each other. The list was the only platform available that the civil society organizations (CSOs) could use to discuss issues and positions prior to the PrepComs of the Geneva phase of WSIS.

### **We came...**

And we came to Geneva, that is, the very few who could get scholarships. No. It was the few who could get Swiss visas and other European transit visas to make it to Geneva. No, no. It was the few who made it to Geneva and managed to get the entry cards that were rationed among all CSOs. Just imagine! Coming all the way and still not getting there...

And the badges that were not just for identification but also for tracking. And the checks and the laser machines... They found a Bible in my bag and did not know whether it was safe to allow "religious XYZ." There were quite a number of other things... the cold... and the lady who lost her handbag in the ladies' room... We experienced all of that!

The engagement of the African civil society was also exhibited. The ICTD platform accepted us. And the African media village became "home" to all those who got tired of the wanderings, the hunger and the cold.

The African civil society issued a position paper which was taken into account in the international civil society contributions. Some of these contributions meandered

into the final Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, even though civil society was not that happy with those two documents.

### **We saw...**

We saw the importance of MSPs. It was sort of a new word and the word programmes of many Office Software versions still do not recognize the French equivalent. We thought that MSP was about collaboration between three sectors to implement projects: governments, private sector and civil society. It could also be understood as a collaborative framework which has been institutionalized, notably since the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and now for WSIS. Each of the three sectors has its “natural” expertise, and put together they have complementary competences. Collaboration between them should therefore bring about sustainability and inclusiveness. However, MSPs are not an end in themselves. We have learnt the following lessons:

- In multi-stakeholder partnerships, civil society appears to be the weakest actor. Civil society is also too financially dependent on the private sector and on governments and therefore is not often seen as a credible actor.
- Civil society appears often as a critic in the eyes of governments and the private sector. It was suggested therefore that it should learn to become a negotiator.
- The African civil society is yet to establish real partnerships with the private sector in the process of the WSIS or beyond that process.
- Partnerships in general can threaten civil society independence and ethic.
- Civil society needed to be better organized and more professional to have a good image.
- Civil society is more supported at the international level than at the national level in most cases.



## **We are yet to conquer**

The war to achieve MSPs will be a long one. Battles come and battles go. But we are yet to conquer. In all areas and with all other stakeholders, civil society still has tasks that it needs to accomplish:

- Partnership between the public sector and civil society: Civil society has to play a more constructive role for inclusive and sustainable development. It has to act as the intermediary between the government and the population. Thus, it has to play a crucial role in the follow-up and evaluation of development programs.
- Partnership between the private sector and civil society: In most cases, the sole interest of the private sector is to make profits. Civil society has to get organized to become a watchdog, and to work to safeguard social rights and to force private businesses to take their social responsibility into account.
- Partnership inside civil society: This includes on the one hand a partnership between its various families, notably with Research and Development entities; and on the other hand a partnership between ICT and non-ICT civil society entities. This sort of cooperation needs to be reinforced.
- Partnership with international organizations: The recognition of civil society at the national and regional level will legitimate it at the international level.

## **A long way to go**

While in Geneva, the African CSOs launched their network: The African Civil Society on the Information Society (ACSIS). It is to play the role of an interface to reinforce hegemony internally and ensure representation externally. Lobbying, training and advising are also part of its charter. But a network alone does not suffice. Its launching must be followed by operationability, action and results. It is *Not Yet Uhuru* but we believe that it is worth the time and effort, as Nelson Mandela puts it, to take *The Long Walk to Freedom!*





### III. Developing the Information Society



# Financing the Information Society: From the almighty power of the market to the need for a development agenda

Chantal Peyer

Reducing the digital divide has been announced as a priority issue of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Thus, Kofi Annan asserted that, “this world meeting is a unique way of developing a common vision with regards to the means needed to overcome the digital divide.”<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, in Geneva, the question of financing – with what money to concretely finance the development of infrastructures, of trainings or of adequate contents – almost caused the negotiations to fail. Because no consensus could be found, the heads of governments had to postpone the decision about this issue to the second phase of the summit.

In order to prepare the second round of negotiations, a task force was called into being by the United Nations Secretary-General and coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and was mandated to write an evaluation on the existing financial mechanisms. Published at the beginning of January 2005, this report, titled *Financing ICTD: A review of trends and an analysis of gaps and promising practices*, served as the basis for discussion at Preparatory Committee meeting (PrepCom-2) in February 2005.

So, what were the conclusions of this report? Has the second phase of WSIS been one of inclusion, of attention being accorded to the poor? Has it enabled the emergence of a nuanced development agenda? Does WSIS, beyond the many speeches, bear witness to true engagement of governments in finding innovative solutions to finance a fair Information Society?

In order to understand the terms in which the debate takes place, three aspects need to be taken into consideration:

- The definition of a framework: the policies and regulations that are put forward to mobilize national and international resources, stimulate growth and diminish poverty.
- The engagement of the international community and donating countries: the promises and visions regarding public aid and development, debt reduction or new financial mechanisms.
- The recognition of the community dimension: taking into account community-driven alternatives to the dominant model, such as free software, community media and networks, etc. For lack of space, this point will only be mentioned on the margins of this analysis.

The texts touching upon these points that have been adopted reveal the power relations at play – between donating countries and beneficiaries, between the North and the South, between the South and the South, or between governments, civil society and the private sector – that have determined the debates.

1 WSIS information brochure, edited by the summit's Executive Secretariat, Geneva, June 2002.

### **Policies needed to mobilize resources: A grain of sand in the market's machine**

During the first phase of WSIS, recommendations for a framework, i.e. policies and regulations to be put in place to mobilize resources, have left little space for the specific discourse about development. Despite its name – “Digital Solidarity Agenda” – the Geneva Plan of Action sees the opening and liberalization of markets, the establishment of transparent and non-discriminatory regulation frameworks, foreign direct investments and public private partnerships (PPPs) as the magic cocktail that will permit the overcoming of the “digital divide.” There is little nuance to be found in this discourse. The sentences that referred to the limits and risks of the liberal development model were stricken from the final texts. This was the case with the following point, which stipulated that, “if ICTs remain solely submitted to the influence of the forces of the market, they could end up by aggravating social inequalities within countries and widen the gap between developed and developing countries.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet, during the second phase of the summit, the work of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms (TFFM) and above all, the ensuing political debates, permitted a nuancing of this vision. The debates and the work confirmed the emergence of a development paradigm that is now recognised in principle, although its content still needs to be defined almost in its entirety. For civil society, this paradigm represents an important opening: a stepping-stone on which to rely in order to demand and propose the elaboration of new policies. Everything remains to be invented, but a grain of sand has slipped into the vision of the almighty power of the market. This is true in two respects: The need for public financing has been recognised, and the need for a specific development agenda has been stipulated.

### **The limits of the market and the need for public financing**

Reiterating the conclusions of the TFFM, the texts adopted at the end of PrepCom-2 in Geneva (February 2005) recognise the existence of a financing gap in the Information Society, as much in terms of infrastructures as in terms of contents. What does a financing gap mean? It means that governments acknowledge that financing has been insufficient and inadequate to sustain a fair participation of all citizens in the Information Society. The fields in which financing has been declared insufficient are:

- The access of poor or rural population groups to means of information and communication, such as landline and mobile telephone, the Internet, radio, TV, etc.
- The development of appropriate local content, for instance radio and television shows in local languages, programming for the illiterate, educational websites containing information about HIV/AIDS and other disease prevention, etc.
- Adequate training in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the basic educational levels, i.e. primary and secondary schools, universities, public administrations, etc., as well as on the level of specialized technical institutes.

But what consequences can be drawn from the existence of this financing gap? What political and economic measures should be used to mobilize new resources? That is precisely where the political issue resides.

<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 4A of the Draft Declaration of Principles, version dated 18 July 2003.

After tough negotiations, and on the insistence of developing countries, a consensus was finally reached at WSIS. It stipulates that in order to reduce the digital divide, a combination of private and public financing needs to be put forward. By default, this can be seen as a recognition of the limits of the market: “We recognize that public finance plays a crucial role in providing ICT access and services to rural areas and disadvantaged populations including those in Small Island Developing States and Landlocked Developing Countries.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, while in the first phase of the summit, the market was credited as being the driving force behind the development of the Information Society, capable of responding to all needs, a new balance between private and public investments is asserted here.

### **The diplomatic confidence of the developing countries**

Without the insistence of the developing countries, the need for public financing to promote the Information Society would not have been recognised in the WSIS texts. As soon as PrepCom-2 began, many countries of the South – among others Senegal, Mali, Cuba, Brazil, Argentina and South Africa – demonstrated their extreme unhappiness with the content of the texts put up for consideration. They criticized the overarching importance granted to the private sector in the TFFM report, the lack of recognition of the role played by public financing, the insufficiency of a real development agenda and the blocking of the creation of a Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF).

During the first written consultation coordinated by the Executive Secretariat, the suggested amendments reflected this diplomatic activism. Indeed, out of 99 proposed changes:

- 81 came from developing countries (mostly from Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, Ghana, South Africa, Botswana, Bangladesh, India and Senegal).
- 9 from wealthy countries (Canada, Japan, USA or EU).
- 2 from the private sector (CCBI).
- 7 from a coalition of civil society groups.<sup>4</sup>

This engagement by the countries of the South, which contrasted with the silence or mainly defensive attitude of the wealthy countries (European Union, United States, but also Japan and Switzerland), is in many regards a positive sign. It reveals a real power to issue propositions and a consolidation of developing countries’ positions with regard to the Information Society. It also sheds light on their will to see the development priorities inscribed into the summit’s agenda. This means insisting that the promises made at Geneva be implemented. Finally, it is a sign of renewed diplomatic confidence of countries that have already emancipated themselves during the last two years in other international forums such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

3 Paragraph 31 of the “Revised Chapter Two of the Operational Part,” 1 March 2005, [www.itu.int/wsisis/docs2/pc2/off11annirevi-fr.doc](http://www.itu.int/wsisis/docs2/pc2/off11annirevi-fr.doc).

4 Chair of the WSIS PrepCom-2 Sub-Committee, “Compilation of Comments on Chapter Two of the Operational Part,” 19 February 2005, [www.itu.int/wsisis/docs2/pc2/working/dti-part2-fr.doc](http://www.itu.int/wsisis/docs2/pc2/working/dti-part2-fr.doc)

## The need for a specific development agenda

Another point reinforces the option of public financing in the WSIS texts: the need to integrate a development or poverty reduction agenda into the national Information Society strategies (e-strategies). Indeed, for the first time in history, the link between ICTs and the reduction of poverty is stated so clearly at such a political level: “We agree that the financing of ICT for development needs to be placed in the context of the growing importance of the role of ICTs, not only as a medium of communication, but also as a development enabler, and as a tool for the achievement of the development goals of the Millennium Declaration.”<sup>5</sup>

What does this sentence mean concretely? Since the 1980s, governments have started to design national strategies (e-strategies) to stimulate the growth of the Information Society. Most often, these were centred on the question of infrastruc-

tures and telecommunications, on the development of a service and product industry making use of ICTs (hardware, software, telework, etc.). The coveted example was Singapore’s deliberate policy to transform the country’s ICT sector into the principal catalyst of economic growth and exports. But in these national strategies for an Information Society, little mention has been made of contents or of social inequalities or poverty reduction. Along the same lines, a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), released in February 2003, demonstrated that out of the 23



developing countries analysed, only three – Benin, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan – had really integrated poverty reduction into their e-strategies.

In saying that ICTs need to be used in order to reduce poverty, the WSIS texts on financing theoretically offer an impulse to compensate these national policies and strategies. Indeed, in order to make ICTs work for the poorest, it is necessary to come up with new policies. In this vision, it is not a matter of sacrificing growth or industrial development, but rather to complement them with measures using ICTs to promote more equality and social cohesion, as well as increased participation. In the elaboration of these policies, civil society has a crucial role to play. It has a unique experience of local economy, projects in rural and disadvantaged areas and community initiatives. It also has a proven ability to suggest innovative policies and regulations that address the challenges of information and communication technologies for development (ICTD).

But for civil society to make its voice heard, an important condition needs to be fulfilled: the implementation of open, transparent and balanced consultation procedures for the elaboration of national strategies for the Information Society. Today, such procedures are the exception. Most often, e-strategies are designed by techno-

5 Paragraph 23 of the “Revised Chapter Two of the Operational Part,” 1 March 2005.

cratic public administrations that are not necessarily inclined to enter into a dialogue with civil society. This is the case in richer countries as well as in developing countries.

### **ICTD: Towards a new political framework**

During WSIS, civil society actors have made many propositions in order to define a new political framework of information and communication technologies for development (ICTD). The following recommendations can be mentioned:

- The creation of an ICTD agency in all countries: mandated to ensure the general coordination of policies meant to put ICTs at the service of the poorest. This agency should also manage the universal access funds, the use of which would be redefined to include training projects, the elaboration of content in local languages or the development of software.
- The implementation of pro-poor regulations, such as the reservation of frequencies for community radio stations, the facilitation of access to licenses for wireless connections (WiFi) or Internet telephony (VoIP), fiscal advantages for organizations that offer services in rural areas, etc.
- Development of infrastructures in rural areas via collaborations between authorities, enterprises and local organizations, with the financial support of the international community.
- Support for community-owned and community-driven networks. Already tested in many different countries, these networks enable the connection of villages in rural areas to already existing national infrastructures through the use of new technologies.
- The development of contents and applications which are adapted to local needs, the promotion of free software and support of community radio stations.<sup>6</sup>

Few of these propositions ever made it into the official texts of WSIS. They nonetheless remain valid reflections and measures that can and must be pursued in the future.

### **Engagement to be expected from the international community**

While there has been recognition of the need to establish a development agenda at WSIS, the answer given by the wealthy countries to the need for additional public financing engendered by this agenda has been a deception.

Indeed, the political will of the OECD countries during the discussions about poverty reduction needs to be assessed in relation to their concrete promises. At WSIS, three months ahead of the summit in Tunis the scorecard is thin: No promise, no concrete and concentrated engagement has been made by the industrialized countries. The positions of the wealthy countries (EU, USA, Japan, Switzerland) can be summed up in one sentence: “We refuse any additional financial engagement.” This means that no in-depth debate about Public Development Aid (PDA) has taken

6 See “Statement on financing the Information Society,” Informal Coalition on Financing (APC, CRIS, Bread for All, Item, IT for Change and digital data base), February 2005; Willie Currie, “A new policy framework for ICTD,” APC, February 2005; R. Gerster and S. Zimmermann, “Up-scaling pro-poor ICT-policies and practices,” SDC, January 2005.

place in WSIS. Nothing has been said about its sufficiency or insufficiency. Even the target of 0.7 % of the gross domestic product (GDP) that the wealthy countries have, for the last 30 years, committed to funnel into the PDA has been watered down by general and unsubstantiated formulations. The text only takes pride in, “exhorting all countries to deploy concrete efforts to honour their respective engagements that stem from the Consensus of Monterrey.”<sup>7</sup> Another example is that the reference made to debt reduction has almost vanished from the texts. Regarding the Digital Solidarity Fund, it was certainly recognized, but the adopted formulation specifies that:<sup>8</sup>

- The states welcome the creation of the fund. However, they do not support it anymore, as a first version of the text suggested.
- The fund will be supplied by voluntary contributions.

For countries of the North, these formulations reflect the acceptance of an inevitable reality and do not demonstrate any form of engagement. Or, to express it otherwise, the OECD countries actually remain entrenched in their positions and refuse any form of contribution by national governments to this fund.

Everything considered, will WSIS lead to a dead end? Will the digital solidarity agenda be nothing else than one more action plan or conditionality imposed upon developing countries, without reciprocal engagement by wealthy countries? As time passes, this assumption seems to be confirmed. And civil society will need to organize well to remind the governments of industrialized states of their lyrical speeches about a “global village.” In the WSIS Plan of Action, one sentence is important in this regard:

“We also encourage multilateral institutions as well as bilateral public donors to consider providing more financial support for regional and large-scale national ICT infrastructure projects and related capacity development ...”<sup>9</sup>

This sentence leaves the door open to an increase in public aid for development, as long as the beneficiary countries establish an agenda and a clear strategy of ICT to reduce poverty.

### **Towards a global information and communication financing**

For civil society, the engagement of the industrialized countries at WSIS is a deception. Indeed, due to the broad needs, the question of financing the Information Society would have deserved an expansion of debates. Today, it is necessary to build a global framework of analysis that relies on the idea of a shared responsibility between connected countries and those that are on the periphery of the Information Society. Two notions enable this change in perspective: that of the public good and that of global taxes.

One of the important elements of the global public good concept is the idea that the value of a communication network increases with every new user. This notion also permits underlining that access to the network brings with it positive externalities for the society, since information and communication contribute towards

7 Paragraph 37.i of the “Revised Chapter Two of the Operational Part,” 1 March 2005.

8 Ibid., para. 38.

9 Ibid., para. 30.



creating revenues, preventing the spread of disease or diminishing poverty. What does this mean in terms of financing? It means that since investments in rural areas are not perceived as bad investments anymore, the connection of poor citizens is promoted. The investment is understood to benefit the entire population of a country, i.e. all users of a network, and is valid in the North as well as in the South.<sup>10</sup>

Global public goods need to be financed globally. This is why at WSIS, different propositions of global taxes have been put forward by civil society. A tax on domain names, on microchips, on e-mails or on computers was proposed or mentioned. The principle is always the same: Find a financing mechanism in the Information Society, for the Information Society, in order to avoid competition with other development objectives such as health, education, and food security.

These propositions have been too innovative, too global, too constraining for governments and too antagonistic to the perspectives of the private sector. This explains why they have not been at the centre of any of the official discussions. They have not been integrated in the governments' texts either. Nevertheless, they remain essential leads in the pursuit of efforts to build a new vision of the Information Society.

## Conclusion

The negotiations at WSIS have not brought about innovations in terms of financing. The defensive attitude of donating countries has, on many occasions, limited the debates to considerations of the improvement of existing mechanisms. So, is WSIS a summit upholding the *status quo*? It is in many regards, but for civil society at least two elements are important for the way ahead, after Tunis, in terms of financing:

At the level of policies, the engagement of the developing countries has added some nuances to the vision that saw liberalization and private investment as the only stepping-stones of the Information Society. The recognition of the limits of the market, as well as the links made in the WSIS texts between ICTs and poverty reduction, represent an evolution of the dominant paradigm. For civil society, this evolution can represent an opportunity: It leaves the door open to a redefinition of national strategies – even international ones – for the Information Society (e-strategies), that take into account the needs of impoverished populations. In this regard, civil society could voice its conceptions for a true development agenda – ICTD agency, pro-poor regulations, community media and networks, free software, etc.

At the level of concrete actions, particularly by donating countries, WSIS was a deception. It has not been the venue for any concrete engagement. For the non-governmental actors, it has nonetheless been an occasion to initiate a reflection about alternative visions, such as the one on the public good and global taxes to finance the Information Society. In that, WSIS will be remembered as a means, not as an end: the means to build networks and analysis that will outlive Tunis.

A true development agenda remains to be negotiated. But its invention has already begun.

10 For more information, see Pablo Accusto and Nikki Johnson, "Financing the Information Society in the South: A global public goods Perspective," *Instituto del tercer Mundo/APC*, 2004, <http://rights.apc.org/documents/financing.pdf>



# Tracking the development agenda at WSIS

Anita Gurumurthy

This article seeks to examine the articulation of the development agenda in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process – taking a look at whether and how concerns that matter to developing countries have been integrated in the WSIS negotiations, attempting a reconnaissance of the agenda that needs to be relocated from the fringes to the centre. It also argues for the need to set the agenda anew, which is a project that pertains to the new world that developing countries aspire to be part of, beyond the WSIS process.

## WSIS as playing field

It seems at this point that we have heard more than enough about the digital divide, a global malady that WSIS decided to address. And yet, the happenings at WSIS are not adequately clear to many actors – globally and locally – involved in agendas connected with social justice and people's well-being. The connections between the substance of WSIS and what it implies for relations of power – between nations and peoples – still have not taken root even in rudimentary form in the public mind. What WSIS stands for is anybody's guess – unarticulated in any unified set of issues or notions.

Going back to the WSIS Declaration of Principles of phase one, we find the notion of a "development-oriented Information Society"<sup>1</sup> strongly invoked. However, the ongoing negotiations in the Tunis phase do not portend much optimism for any concrete outcomes for the cause of equity and social justice, and thus, this notion of a development-oriented Information Society (IS) is mostly unclaimed. Yet, Tunis represents an opportunity for contestations that embody, among other things, the need and desire for an IS that is inclusive and people-centred. It is a milestone that inscribes through its processes and journey the attempts to evolve and refine new language to capture the desires and possibilities contained in the IS.

## Players and positions: Locating the South in the current IS discourse

The ongoing WSIS process represents a watershed in developing a vision of using the new information and communication technologies for development (ICTD). Its deliberations and resulting documents lay out some useful directions, building on an emergent body of knowledge about the interface between new technologies and development. However, given the rapid and complex changes of the IS, the vision of a development-oriented IS is still work in progress. Between phase one and two of WSIS itself, debates have evolved in new directions, signifying the magnitude of the unknowns, and the need to engage continuously with the new realities and emerging possibilities of the IS. They also reflect the emerging tensions and challenges as well as mixed outcomes of early experiments in using new ICTs for development.

1 Document WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/4-E, <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>

Needless to say, a vision and roadmap for a development-oriented IS is crucial for the global South. However, most concepts and frameworks of an IS, even those pertaining to development as in WSIS, have come from the North. Further, just like the World Trade Organization (WTO) arena, the WSIS arena is also witness to the power imbalances and differences of perception between the North and the South. A somewhat rapid appraisal of the WSIS arena and the players in this global field is warranted at this point. We need to map within the space that WSIS represents the intersections that echo with development discourse.

The governments of the North have been engaging with the far-reaching institutional changes in their own societies, which were ushered in by the new paradigms of the IS in almost all areas – ranging from business, media and governance to social sectors and entertainment – and yet, they fail to recognize the potential for institutional transformation that IS paradigms hold for the South. The result is that the notions of the IS seen as relevant for the South are at one end oversimplistic formulations – “mobile phones are better than computers”<sup>2</sup> and at another, constitute attempts at cooptation of the South into dominant information economy models that urge the South to join global value chains through Information Technology (IT) and IT-enabled service skills.

Northern civil society is supportive of and sympathetic to the development and rights-based concerns of the South; however, it brings to the table perspectives that do not sufficiently account for the existing development realities and needs of the South. Civil society from the North has seen the biggest opportunity of the IS in the areas of media and communication rights – and pushed the WSIS process to recognize this. Communication rights are critical also for the South no doubt, but the promise of the IS for the South lies also in the complete range of opportunities for institutional transformation and a shift in development delivery that IS paradigms can bring. Also, communication rights for the South have to be situated within the context of existing political struggles and priorities. The right to information campaign is a case in point.

Southern governments have seen new ICTs mostly in terms of economic opportunity – in IT software, hardware, and increasingly, in IT-enabled outsourcing. While at international fora like WSIS, they argue for funding towards ICT infrastructure and ICT-related capacity building for development needs, their ICTD vision and action at home is feeble and uncertain. ICTD in most countries of the South is the responsibility of telecom and IT ministries that mostly deal with market para-



2 See “The Real Digital Divide,” *The Economist* 10 March 2005, [http://www.economist.com/opinion/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=3742817](http://www.economist.com/opinion/displayStory.cfm?story_id=3742817)

digms and are deficient in engaging with development and hence with ICTD. Development departments, on the other hand, lack the orientation and capacities to engage with ICTD, which is largely misconstrued as a technical domain. The upshot is that the opportunity for systemic transformation in governance and development delivery through ICTs remains to be seized. Southern governments have also been unclear about what they will bring back from WSIS, and fail to see how the outcomes of WSIS can make or mar their stakes for economic and social development.

Southern civil society has often seen the IS discourse as a multinational corporations-led globalization agenda – and hence challenged the same from different perspectives including labour rights, decimation of the domestic economy, cultural diversity, intellectual property rights (IPR) and sovereignty. They often consider ICTD as a red herring that distracts from the real issues of development, a fact reflected in the very limited participation of community-based organizations in the WSIS process. This situation has seen an increasing chasm between civil society actors in the ICTD sector, who have mostly uncritically adopted a technology and market-led paradigm, and the “traditional” development sector.<sup>3</sup> Further, Southern civil society has lacked the research and research-based advocacy skills to formulate the concepts and frameworks for ICTD that place Southern development priorities at the centre. This has meant the absence of engagement with policy at national and global levels and a lack of theoretical grounding when carrying out projects at local levels. Civil society groups have not been able to acquire the expertise needed to forewarn their delegates at WSIS about positions that weaken the South. The capacities that shut down the WTO ministerial meetings at Seattle and Cancun are missing in the global South when it comes to IS issues.

The donor community has been the primary architect of the ICTD framework in the South. As the Cornell handbook for telecentre staffs<sup>4</sup> notes with particular reference to telecentres, which have been the mainstay of ICTD in the rural South: “The telecentre movement has gained substantial momentum during the past five years largely through the leadership of international organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, UNESCO, the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and the US Agency for International Development.” These agencies have adopted models that are primarily large-scale and do not build on existing development activity in the local areas. And the ICTD world’s favored typical “telecentre model” seems to be a standardized institution that attempts a clean break with existing development practice and considers its superiority in being a panacea for all development issues while also being a self-financing development strategy with its (often imagined) revenue models.

### **Zooming in on the ICTD trajectory**

The directions for ICTD were set in the context of the fast pace of change in the technology arena around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Early engagements with ICTs

3 The “traditional development sector” is used here to signify civil society actors who are engaged with the development and rights agenda outside of and prior to the advent of ICTD in development intervention.

4 <http://ip.cals.cornell.edu/commdev/handbook.cfm>

came mostly from the North, specifically the business sector of the North. These developments have by and large been opaque to and distant from the traditional development sector. Some specific circumstances of the birth and growth of ICTD merit mention: In 2001, a private consulting company and a non-profit organization based in the United States and mostly oriented to public issues in the US partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to write the Digital Opportunity Initiative (DOI) report. Its concepts have been adopted by bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors as their "ICTD policy framework." A second circumstance, related to the first, is that since national governments and local players in ICTD lacked the capacity to react at policy levels to the new circumstances created by the sudden influx of ICTs, ICTD policy and practice frameworks at national levels have also largely been built on the pro-market thrust of this report.

It must also not be forgotten that the trends of "market fundamentalism" (i.e. the market as the solution to development) in ICT policy have coincided with the establishment of several forums (global compact, DOT Force, UN ICT Task Force, etc.) which went to great pains to include business entities.<sup>5</sup> This has undoubtedly vitiated the formulation of policy approaches and the ethos, as it were, of models for ICTD.

The typical scenario that has evolved in most of the global South is one of unfamiliarity with how technology fits in as a solution to local development priorities and, with few exceptions,<sup>6</sup> a herd mentality in the pursuit of the infamous social enterprise model – pushing local communities into setting up telecentres for creating a local market for ICT-based services, when the community is not sure what ICTs can do for them. Many of these initiatives, blessed and lauded by big donor agencies, have also been encouraged and compelled to adopt public private partnerships (PPPs) – unproblematically constructed as the Corporate Social Responsibility – based involvement of powerful private sector players in local initiatives. What the entry of Microsoft or Hewlett-Packard means for development politics, and whether there could be a different interpretation of partnerships, one that begins with an acknowledgement of power equations among collaborators, and proceeds to explore arrangements that serve local interests, has been left out almost completely in local development debates in the South.

Critical voices have been few and far between, which examine how the ICTD trajectory has proceeded. In fact, most assessments are done by "experts" involved directly or indirectly either with funding- or technology-transfer donors or recipients.<sup>7</sup> Given that the push came from outside and that a critical mass of diverse local actors using different approaches does not exist, well-informed stocktaking of ICTD interventions and midstream corrections based on a cross-fertilizing of ideas have been absent. And therefore, a hard look at what ails current models, and more

5 Annette Esterhuysen, "Multi-stakeholder participation and ICT policy processes," <http://www.apc.org/english/news/index.shtml?x=31497>

6 Indeed there are notable exceptions where on a small scale, local communities, local governments and NGOs have tried to use ICTs towards their priorities and mandates.

7 Ted Byfield, "Thoughts on the telecentre as a model for ICT deployment in the rural South," draft [02] memo for the Social Sciences Research Council, [www.ssrc.org/programs/itic/publications/knowledge\\_report/memos/byfieldmemoi.pdf](http://www.ssrc.org/programs/itic/publications/knowledge_report/memos/byfieldmemoi.pdf)

importantly, a critical and sharp vision of what needs to be done so that ICTs work for development has been lacking.

With little critical perspective that is bottom-up, coming from localized experiences, Southern civil society at WSIS has been quite at the margins, unable to spell out critiques or alternatives. Also, the processes around WSIS are different from most global policy processes in that the structures for participation demand that Southern actors work simultaneously from “inside” and “outside,” panning the paradoxes of being co-opted into official processes, while constituting the critical voice that may be in opposition to governments and being alert to the interests of their own countries. While global advocacy has always needed tact, the multi-stakeholderism and the concomitant alliance building and strategic posturing required at WSIS do not come easily for most Southern groups.

An important and, one can argue, even primary issue about the IS arena is that the epochal shift that we are part of implies great fluidity. Not everything is known, and in these times of transition, development actors need to reinvent themselves and yet they may not be adequately equipped to make much of the new opportunities and to tackle the new challenges.

The difficulties in integrating IS issues within current mandates – from the relevance of ICTs for governance and poverty reduction to the emerging bottom-up media discourse, new paradigms of knowledge production and sharing, and implications of software ownership and control expressed in open and proprietary models – arise not just for community-based or local organizations. Even UN agencies have found it difficult to interpret their mandates in IS frameworks, or to put it differently, interpreting IS issues within their mandates. The UNDP has been unsure about what would be a good strategy – whether ICTD should be a targeted programme or a mainstreamed activity, and not so long ago declared a policy shift by positing that ICTs will no longer be a focus area but a crosscutting strategy. So while it was very active at the turn of the century in ICTD issues, UNDP’s presence has been muted at WSIS.

### **The path of development in the IS – despite or thanks to WSIS?**

Notwithstanding the unsatisfactory evolution of ICTD, the fundamentals about the value of ICTs for development remain unaltered and, in fact, are reasonably well demonstrated.

ICTs are not merely tools for information and communication, but enable paradigmatic shifts in institutional and organizational arrangements. They hold the potential to transform both governance and development delivery in a manner that can overcome structural bottlenecks in these areas. They promote greater efficiency and transparency in the planning, monitoring and delivery of development, through easier coordination, increased information sharing, and more effective outreach. They allow local communities and local government to develop innovative solutions to meet their priorities. However, at this point, the developing world needs considerable social investments and a deliberate and conscious planning for deploying ICTs towards development goals.

Also, it is increasingly clear that IS issues implicate global policy as much as national and local policy, and with implications that transcend the mandates of existing global governance structures. For instance, the IS permeates the space of intel-

lectual property in many ways. While alternative IPR regimes such as Creative Commons have promoted the adoption of more equitable ways to produce and share knowledge in the digital age, new IPR frameworks are needed to address the complex domain of the Internet. International negotiations in this area need to account for the concerns of developing countries. In this context, the US and Japanese governments' attempts to scuttle discussion on strengthening a development agenda in the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is very significant. The contestations in the IS bring up old geo-politics but also seem to hold a great threat for entrenched interests.

Another issue that is at the heart of development is the one of the open content paradigm. While the Geneva phase of WSIS recognised the need for open content paradigms – for scientific and technical information – what this paradigm means for free access to development and socially useful content is an issue that WSIS negotiations have been silent on.

The trade-off between the expediency of relying on a mainstream propriety platform, and using free and open source software that helps build local software competencies and is also cost-effective in development situations, is an important public policy issue. However, developing country responses to this issue are not uniform. Many Southern governments, like India, have extensively partnered with Microsoft at national and sub-national levels in their ICTD strategies, while countries like Brazil have been strongly in favour of open source. Countries like China have set up a national body for the adoption of open source and local software. Because of internal divisions, Southern governments have not come up with a unified position on open source with a cogent argument that defends their interest. The debates on open source at WSIS have not gone as far as tabling the opportunity costs of using proprietary software and recognizing what is desirable if a “development-oriented information society” is to be contemplated.

One can safely say that we are at the beginning of the rumbling that will soon build up to a crescendo of a multiplicity of issues that will need to be grappled with. And the moot point is whether WSIS can address these adequately to be able to resolve them. The “public” – in its global and local forms – is being redefined in multifarious ways that need global policy response, beyond what may be expected at WSIS. So what can the South hope to get back from WSIS?

### **Institutionalizing the development agenda in WSIS – Can WSIS deliver?**

The context of the development agenda in the IS is one of the nascent intersections of concepts and practice. And the result of this is a situation in which the case of an unarticulated agenda is being used at the WSIS to undermine the equally valid claims that developing countries have to define over time their stakes in a world in transition on their own terms. In PrepCom-2 of the Tunis phase, the claims of the South for committed funding towards ICTD were dismissed with the simplistic formulation that development assistance in health, poverty reduction, etc. were more important; as if these priorities compete with required investments for a development-oriented IS. Such a formulation suited the market-based IS framework that the business sector and governments of the North have advocated. The IS terrain by default was to be considered purely a market area. The larger canvas of the role of public policy and the canons of social justice and equity in shaping an ICTD frame-

work that can better meet these very development priorities – health, poverty eradication, education, etc. – was not understood and did not find adequate representation in the financing debate at WSIS.

Though they constitute an important beginning, the WSIS processes and outcomes have not clearly underlined the kind of opportunities that the IS holds for the South, nor have they stressed the imperative for institutional investments to realize these. Under the circumstances, the WSIS platform cannot be seen as a point of closure, but as a vehicle that will open the spaces for a continued debate and discussion by the global community on the many emergent issues that clearly need be addressed from new vantage points.

The hope for developing countries lies in the spaces for contestation beyond WSIS – in the structures of implementation that will be set up. There is a need for an overarching global policy body that looks specifically at IS issues, and as needed, coordinates with other UN organizations. Developing countries need to shake themselves out of their fatigue with the WSIS process, realizing that there may not be another opportunity in the immediate future to build global policy frameworks for the Information Age. If some permanent structures can be salvaged from WSIS, there is at least an opportunity to build on them in the future.

The role of civil society activism in the South in relation to the IS is at this point essentially to highlight to their country delegations the opportunity for turning the geo-political tables in their favour. Coming back from WSIS without real options for negotiating IS issues in times ahead would be disastrous. WSIS could not tackle development issues. But beyond the WSIS arena, the public domain is rife with contestations – “South-South alliances are already upsetting our commonsensical definitions of info-development. Examples include the surprising extent to which a ‘multilateral’ version of internet governance has been able to muster support, the ‘tropicalization’ (Gilberto Gil) of open source approaches, and new alliances on the politics of IPR (WIPO Development Agenda). Info-development, that is, has ceased to be a matter of technology transfer and has become a major terrain for the renegotiation of some of the faultlines of geopolitical conflict – with a new set of actors.”<sup>8</sup> The successful campaign against the Software Patent Bill, directed to the European Parliament and to the European Council and supported by the EuroLinux Alliance together with European companies and non-profit associations, is yet another such instance.

Internet governance (IG) is only the first important IS issue at the centre of the WSIS negotiating table presently that is suggestive of the policy and governance dimensions of emerging issues in the IS. Today, there is general agreement that the Internet cannot be governed like the global telecom has been governed until now. There will soon be other IS issues which will deserve similar engagement. Some of these are already probable, others less clear at present. Many of these issues will need new global engagements, global public policies and global governance arrangements (all, of course, in addition to the national and local ones).

The critical space for articulating development concerns within WSIS lies in arguing for an empowered structure after Tunis that will initiate a systematic stocktaking as well as action in emerging IS areas, and will address the need for institutional

8 See <http://incommunicado.info/conference>.

mechanisms for global policies in this area. If this can be achieved, half of the battle may have been won. The other half of course depends on what Southern states make of the open territory ahead – how they do their homework and how well they negotiate to ensure development gains that are sustainable and equitable.



# Education and research: Developing an open cognition platform

Divina Frau-Meigs

*Our principle:*

*Shared knowledge societies, via an open cognition paradigm and open access tools.*

*Our plan of action:*

*Scaling up strategies for transferability and sustainability.*

Cognition may sound like a big ringing word, but it is quite fitting in a world summit which is ambitiously considering the “information society” or, in the preferred language of civil society, “knowledge societies.” Information relates to data as raw material, knowledge to the expected end-result, but the way to move from one to the other, the processing mechanism, is cognition. Cognition is what makes the wiring of our brains, the wiring of the computers and the wiring of societies transparent and manageable. Cognition combines reason and emotion with the full realization that our environment impacts our brain and conversely. It posits an understanding of human nature as being collaborative, working for mutual benefits in an open-ended process of expanding exchanges of intelligence. So a shift from an information provider paradigm, very prominent in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), to an open cognition paradigm and its attendant platform is necessary, because the primary scale for human activities is the local community of place and language. Creating situated knowledge societies for sustainable development and the preservation of human and cultural diversity is a valid response to needs that are not pre-established by outer interests, be they political or economic, as long as they foster democracy and tolerance.

Within this open cognition paradigm and platform, education can explain and transmit this new breakthrough in the understanding of human nature and support it by giving a soul to the new network technologies that allow for distributed intelligence and collaboration. Computers and derived media offer the capacity of extending our brainpower and of communicating our ideas and discoveries to others over long distances. Beyond conveying information, they provide resources for action in real and virtual situations for shared benefits. This implies an extension of solidarity, in the direction of developing countries, from within the education and academic communities, as civil society’s own vision of how to bridge the information divide and turn it into cognition dynamics. The open cognition agenda is therefore primarily geared to empower the less powerful – women, the young and the poor – in the developed and developing world, in view of their own sustainability. They are the forgotten constituencies that nonetheless contribute to the consent of the governed. For them, global public policies should be developed, with an increased cohesion around North-South and South-South distributed networks, to build social capital and social justice.

## **I. The alter-agenda of open cognition: Four strategies for human empowerment**

To reach this goal, some priorities have to be advanced and such has been the endeavour of the Education Task Force. It is composed of a large number of network heads and non-governmental organization (NGO) leaders on the five continents, trying to build consensus among civil society entities. It has been acting pragmatically as a lobby to governments and international agencies, providing language and pushing the open cognition agenda and platform. The platform focuses on four strategies for human empowerment and four tools for its implementation. The four strategies span the whole chain of knowledge production and reproduction, which goes from primary teaching to university and research. The attendant tools are open access and content tools, in combination with cost-effective financing and governance mechanisms. The overarching cognitive strategy is to give preference to collective use over private and individual use, by launching real-life experiments with collective applications that can be multiplied, duplicated and transferred as often as possible.

### **I.1 Teacher training with media and ICTs via an open cognition pedagogy**

Internet and videoconferencing devices cannot replace human presence and face-to-face interaction but they nevertheless provide powerful tools to support education, either in specialized learning environments, or in open and distance education facilities. In countries where teachers are scarce and often lack proper instruction, such environments and systems, when available, must be used in priority for their training, to enable them to upgrade their competence and qualification. In addition, ensuring that ICTs can be aptly relayed by cheaper local media, such as radio or TV channels and adapted programs and software, can prove remarkably efficient and economical and can help to train, qualify, and empower whole generations of teachers, tutors and trainers.

An open cognition pedagogy needs to be developed to enhance the use of media and ICTs for basic literacy and knowledge acquisition. In teacher-trainee relationships, it must foster peer-to-peer exchanges, responsiveness, connectedness, participation, flexibility and collaboration. Learning to learn is as essential as learning about facts and contents. Teachers need to be provided with an education in methodology and subject matters as much as in technology for their own self-sufficiency and their grasp of the costs and benefits associated with ICTs. A major focus should be placed on the development and continuous enrichment of training materials to allow for peer practitioner networking support and development, especially via free software use. The training sessions should always be concluded with an official validation process and regular degrees providing the teacher with a proof of improved competence, and the guarantee of a better career. Governments need to consider new designs of degree and diploma accreditations, granted by legitimate local entities, in keeping with their expectations of content and practices.

### **I.2 Media and ICT education via a modular curriculum**

To be “information literate,” people need to know why, when, and how to use media and ICT tools and to think critically about the perspective they provide. ICT literacy is complementary to media education as it is concerned with teaching and learning about the whole range of contents, sources and delivery modes and how to use them. Media and ICT education goes beyond basic literacy as the aim is to develop both

critical understanding and active participation, to produce citizens as much as learners and workers.

Governments should adopt an international document providing a rationale for media and ICT education. Such a document must provide a modular curriculum for development, as well as its implementation and monitoring at national level. The curriculum should provide a clear model of learning progression, details of specific learning outcomes, expressed in terms of competencies, criteria and procedures for evaluation and assessment. Adequate teaching materials and resources, free of intellectual property rights (IPR) and context-specific, in the local language, should be made available via an Internet portal. It should be introduced wherever possible within formal national curricula as well as in non-formal settings, for lifelong education.

### **1.3 Open courseware recommendation and validation body**

The WSIS member states should support the creation of an open courseware recommendation for a consortium under the aegis of an international organization, like UNESCO for instance, and in coordination with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the field. This would allow non-profit educational institutions to develop and expand their current teaching offer in higher education, at the undergraduate level for a start, extending it progressively to all disciplines, in the sciences and the humanities, to cover all curricular needs.

This recommendation would help create a coherent body of standards and formats for exchange across currently existing websites that provide the primary teaching materials for courses taught at educational non-profit institutions. It would help reduce costs while expanding the network of distributed intelligence worldwide, by the pooling of human and physical resources. Mirror sites, allowing for low band downloading, should be planned for developing countries to reduce costs. The consortium could also push further the open publishing concept by setting procedures to explain and enhance it. This would promote sustainability at the local and regional level while encouraging exchanges of materials around the world, in the spirit of pluralism and cultural diversity.

Beyond open courseware, educational establishments specialized in ICTs should be promoted and enhanced in developing countries in order to support national ICT policies. They can diffuse their knowledge towards lower teaching levels, as well as to a variety of economic sectors and they can facilitate North-South and South-South transfers of know-how. Based on the capacities of these already existing institutions, regional networks could be created to encourage the establishment of more schools of engineers, managers and innovators, taking into account a balance between genders and a balance between content engineering and infrastructure engineering. Libraries and archives, as repositories of content and publicly-funded knowledge, should also be among the priorities for development.

### **1.4 International researchers' charter and complaints body**

Researchers, together with computer professionals and teachers, should develop a full awareness of their role in knowledge societies. They are also under risk of seeing the product of their work privatized and made accessible only on condition of revenue and income. They should be allowed to contribute to it with a status that

confirms their full and free contribution. Clear principles should be developed for the use and distribution of the body of knowledge they produce, as it is a global common good that should be accessible via a variety of means and media, to avoid the risk of high dependency on digital technology alone.

An international researchers' charter should be created to establish the rights and obligations of the research community (all disciplines included) in the Information Age for knowledge societies. It should propose a number of principles, among which are the right to seek, retrieve and distribute research results freely, the respect of the claim of researchers to independent, open and fair working conditions, and the free access to archives, libraries, universities and other entities funded through public resources. A number of means to implement these rights and obligations should be put in place, including an international complaints body, to raise awareness and sanction abuses whenever they occur.

Universities and research entities should help in setting up open access archives, libraries and journals, and they should ensure that these are interoperable, so as to increase and promote scientific diffusion, broad adoption and innovation. To spread the culture of the open cognition paradigm, especially in developing countries, the sciences as well as the humanities associations and professional societies should be implicated in this process and be active lobbyists with national governments to speed it along and scale it up. Community informatics and computer professionals also should get involved, to develop community-level training programmes within target regions in community informatics and engineering, to support research and education in design methodologies that foster the involvement of communities in the design, implementation and management of ICTs they decide to use.

## **II. Four implementation tools for open cognition: The bumpy road ahead**

All the previous strategies cannot expand or produce awareness and growth unless there is a concerted effort at reduction of the present disconnect between the needs for cultural and educational products and their costs. The tools are based on the idea of open access and open contents, and related to civil society movements like free software, open contents and Creative Commons. They offer a viable alternative to the on-going privatization of knowledge by providing a non-proprietary resource that can be improved upon and used by local communities for their adaptive needs.

### **II.1 An open source backbone**

Open source code and free software are a valuable resource that can help reduce the disconnect between needs and costs in education. Their basic tenet – collaboration and distributed intelligence – supports the open cognition paradigm. They are a viable alternative to proprietary software in schools so as to allow for autonomy and project-oriented developments at low maintenance cost. There should be a continuous open source backbone, from the operating system to the software, up to user-friendly desktop facilities. A lot of this material already exists, but it needs to be applied to develop curricula where learners can acquire real computing skills and not just “directions for use.” Courses need to be designed to make such acquisitions as user-friendly as possible, with special attention to gender stereotypes. Databases where free software applications and materials are available do exist but need to be disseminated widely in schools, libraries and archives.

Governments need to create awareness about these possibilities and counter-balance proprietary materials and products with an equivalent offer of free software alternatives and training in open source code, so as to be in fair and open competition. Publications and practical guides need to be disseminated, explaining the open source and free software rationale (ethics, principles, non-proprietaryness), the advantages (low cost, security, flexibility, etc.) as well as points for further development and design (pedagogy, practice, community-sustainability, etc.). They should enhance capacity-building by networking among developers and users of free software and developers and users of other software, with interoperability priorities.

## **II.2 An education exemption to IP rights for access to repositories of content**

Another disconnect is the duration of IPR and patents. The WSIS process is a unique opportunity to clearly establish categories of what belongs to the public domain and what does not, of legitimate or abusive time-constraints and fair or unfair uses. ICTs should facilitate access to public domain documents, with special indexes and metadata. Nation states should develop policies to help users learn about their rights and responsibilities and clarify the access to these metadata and administrative processes. The current management of the rights of access is so complicated that it produces chilling effects on the use and development of materials. These obstacles are a severe impediment to the development of valid teaching materials and reference documents that would otherwise facilitate scaling up modalities (being able to develop modules, to duplicate them, to adapt them for transfer) for education, training and research.

The task force recognizes the importance of copyright in the interest of development of innovation and of fair remuneration of creative work, but it upholds that it should be balanced by a public right of access to knowledge, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, Art. 27). As a result, it recommends an exemption from IPR for archiving and educating, in the non-profit contexts of education and research, like schools, museums, libraries, archives, etc. It would not be unlike a right of fair use. Some initiatives have already been taken in that direction, like the European Union's directive on an exemption for education and archiving, but it is ineffectual and unequal if not adopted worldwide.

## **II.3 A mandatory Universal Service Fund as the main financial mechanism**

The education task force advocates the centrality of public funding of education and the role of community-driven initiatives, with local control of financial mechanisms and content. ICTs emanate from public finance and research and as such should remain a public utility and resource, to which all must contribute fully. Creating a mandatory Universal Service Fund for education is a public priority and should be seen as a long-term investment for all partners, private and public. When the French Third Republic invented education for all on a lay, free and compulsory basis, it did not act on a viable business model. It created schools in every community and a highly trained body of teachers with an emancipatory mission. The ensuing success for business and administration can be monitored through history. A similar jump start has to be accomplished now.

Other sustaining mechanisms can support the creation of such a service fund, especially to make sure of good returns on investment, like places that are well

equipped (especially with Internet technology) and can complement each other: schools, telecentres, libraries, and archives. The Universal Service Fund could use some of the tax benefits of the private sectors, with mandates to provide public schools and libraries with access to media and ICTs, as well as to appropriate software and applications and the means of their upgrading and maintenance. These projects should also be aimed at public media, open access, shared ICT application platforms, including government information systems to be cost-effective.

Governments need to promote and create business regulations that allow open access and open source hardware and software production to be in fair and public competition with other private sector services. Besides the Universal Service Fund, this can be done with public finance mechanisms that can favour micro credit, project-oriented guaranteed loans, foundation support, etc. Governments can also develop plans to leverage media and ICT industry competition policies, to remain engaged in national public services and to encourage competition for new learning opportunities, going against the international corporate monopolies by transparent anti-trust policies and balanced intellectual property (IP) laws.

#### **II.4 Interoperability and open-endedness for Internet governance (IG)**

Internet governance is crucial for education and research development, and symmetrically, education and research are crucial to the development of the Internet and future ICTs. There is a co-dependence between a country's capacity to provide basic literacy in media and ICT education and its capacity to create learning economies and to facilitate cultures for knowledge and employment.

For public education in an open cognition paradigm, whatever the developments of the Internet and future ICTs, it is essential to actively promote the openness of the system at both ends and to maintain interoperability. Privatized media tend to prefer point-to-point communication, closing in the networks' potential so as to be able to charge the end-user, whereas it is essential for cognitive media and distributed networks to remain multi-point at the producer level and the user level, these two roles being potentially interchangeable. For a viable, plural and diverse Internet, interoperability is essential, both between competing private systems and with the open source backbone, which government regulations should make mandatory.

The WSIS process should aim at enhancing cooperation and coordination among the variety of multi-stakeholder partners, with a view to establishing criteria for evaluation, improvement and sustainability. It should raise awareness on the need for wider, more equitable access to multilingual information on the global networks, ensuring the worldwide dissemination of good practices and resources. It should also assist in the emergence or consolidation of knowledge industries in the developing countries, to foster viable local content and facilitate their access to international distribution networks.

#### **Conclusion**

Though these ideas may seem utopian, they are already being experimented with, in a variety of forms in different countries and regions, and within a number of international agencies and NGOs. Open source standards and procedures for teacher training are already well-established through programs like the UNESCO initiative ITRAINOnline (<http://www.itrainonline.org/>) and the FAO-funded IMARC.

UNESCO also offers information processing tools such as the Open Source Greenstone Digital Library System ([www.greenstone.org](http://www.greenstone.org)) and the UNESCO Free and Open Source portal. For Media Education, the newly-created NGO MENTOR is working on a modular curriculum kit. A consortium of universities worldwide (MIT, UNU, Paristech, etc.) is preparing an open courseware recommendation, while an “International Researchers’ Charter for Knowledge Societies” has been drafted by the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), to be launched in Tunis. Interesting stirrings seem to be taking place at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), which realizes the need to consider IP rights for development. A kind of Universal Service Fund is in place in the United States, where it is called the “e-rate.” The exemption from IP rights for education and archiving is a directive of the European Union (Directive 2001/29/CE adopted 22 May 2001). WSIS is focusing on Internet governance and financial mechanisms like the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF).

Chaotic as it may seem, the vision is slowly taking shape and the open cognition platform is already partly in place. The road will be bumpy but the trail is already blazed. The education community’s role, as a catalyst for change, is to make it into a full-fledged master narrative, with an emancipatory mission, within the process and beyond, in an inclusive manner that seeks to capitalize on existing resources while encouraging and showcasing new initiatives.

Beyond Tunis and WSIS, the open cognition platform is connected to the Millennium Development Goals. The “Issue Team” on education will need to produce reports and assessments of the process, and these should be research-based, for the sake of quality, coordination and overall legitimacy. This implies the full recognition of the Education Task Force and of civil society actors on process as much as on substance. On process, civil society needs to appear as the alter-partner, not the forgotten partner it too often is. On substance, it needs to be an equal partner from the design stage to the implementation and evaluation stages, with a focus on outcome rather than output, with clear monitoring devices, a proper allocation of financial resources and a transparent multi-stakeholder partnership mechanism.

# Gender equality politics for media and ICTs in Africa

L. Muthoni Wanyeki

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) set out aspirations for gender equality in twelve sectors, which have guided and informed advocacy efforts by the African women's movement to realize these aspirations in the African media sector.<sup>1</sup> During the processes in connection with the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the aim has been to go beyond the African media sector to the information and communications technologies (ICTs) and telecommunications sectors. This has been the case because the growing convergence of media made possible by ICTs and telecommunications has impacted on both the African media as well as the information and communications work done by the African women's movement.

## Unseen and unheard

Section J of the Beijing PFA addresses gender and the media. It highlights universal concerns about both the content of the media in respect to women and the participation of women within the media. Ten years later, the coverage and participation of African women remains a concern. African women's concerns are granted primarily "soft" coverage in the media. The coverage of women's concerns is therefore still marginalized in daily papers and on radio and television programmes, although there is some movement away from traditional women's sections and programmes. African women still do not feature in the "hard" sections of the media, except as aberrations or victims.

The media has also still not deconstructed the notion of the "general public" – a notion that ignores the fact that events impact differently on Africa's many publics – young and old, male and female, rural and urban, etc. Basic data is not adequately disaggregated. And media skills and policies have yet to be evolved to ensure that women's voices, interpretations and solutions are mainstreamed and are covered as part and parcel of the daily news, economic analyses and political analyses. Women are still interpreted as passive, rather than as active.

The persistence of gender concerns around the content of African media is perhaps not surprising given African women's limited participation within the media. The figures are telling – unsurprisingly so, given the lack of clear, formal and gender-responsive internal media policies on maternity, on sexual harassment and on training and advancement. This lack continues to mitigate against women's ability to compete effectively on a level playing field with male counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

1 See reports from the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in November 1999.

2 See reports and proposals put forth by a coalition of Kenyan media women, led by the Association of Media Women of Kenya (AMWK) and the Interlink Rural Information Service (IRIS).



## **The heart of the matter**

But beyond the coverage and participation of African women in the media are gender concerns that are less obvious and less easy to address. The fundamental rights to the freedoms of expression and information are recognised at the international level in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and legally protected in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which most African governments are parties to. At the regional level, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights also legally protects these rights. And in October 2002, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which monitors the African Charter, elaborated on these rights in a Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression in Africa.

Most African states constitutionally protect these rights although few elaborate what they mean in subsidiary legislation, policies and practice. Through the advocacy for increased independence and pluralism of the African media in the 1990s, much attention was paid to the ways in which these rights have been subtly hindered or expressly violated by various African states. However, little attention was paid to the gendered nature of the realization of these rights. For the majority of African women, the exercise of the fundamental rights to the freedoms of expression and information is doubly constrained – by patriarchal law and practice (customary, religious and statutory) and by economic and political conflicts (masked as communal or “ethnic” conflict), whose impact is without doubt gendered. The failure to understand and interpret these rights from a gendered perspective compounds the situation and also poses gender-based difficulties for female media practitioners in Africa.

Finally, although the right to communicate is not yet recognised at either the international or the regional levels, there is growing acknowledgement of the need for such recognition among development communications and media practitioners in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> What does communication mean to the majority of African women – those outside of urban areas, those either completely illiterate or illiterate in the colonial and/or national languages, those without any access to (let alone control over) the basic means of communication? There has been talk concerning this issue in Africa ever since the independence period in the 1960s. And there have been a number of strategies put forth to address this issue, notably those that gave rise to the African rural press and national broadcasters. Today, the rural press and national broadcasters are deemed to have failed – in any case, African women did not feature in such strategies.

## **Public broadcasting**

There is some merit in revisiting the rural press and decentralizing national broadcasters in a manner that holds them accountable to the public (rather than to the ruling party). This is particularly so with respect to radio broadcasting. Until the late 1980s and early 1990s, broadcasting was the preserve of the state in Africa. Independent African states inherited and expanded colonial broadcasting systems (including the national transmission infrastructure) and maintained a large reserve on the

3 See the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC), Communications Charter, adopted in Milan, Italy in 1999.

frequency spectrum for security purposes. As these national broadcasting and transmission systems were (and, but to a lesser extent, continue to be) funded with public money, they are public broadcasters. However, these national broadcasting and transmission systems tended to function more as state (or even ruling party) broadcasters. This situation derived from and was reflected in the acts establishing the national broadcasters, usually placing them directly under the ministries of information and/or communication.

Implicit in these arrangements was the assumption that the government of the day (and, more specifically, the ruling party of the day) represented the public – assumed to be homogenous. Thus, there were few attempts to reflect age and gender differentiation in the management of the national broadcasters, although some attempts were made, for obvious political reasons, to reflect ethnic/regional and religious differentiation.

However, the late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed internal movements for political pluralism, linked with internal and external demands for economic liberalization and privatization intended to limit the potential for state corruption and to improve efficiency in production through the introduction of competition. The resulting political and economic changes impacted on broadcasting. Commercial broadcasters were established and entered the market. However, these have tended to be limited to national capital cities, have content ratios of much music and few spoken words and broadcast primarily in non-African languages.

In addition, community broadcasting – participatory broadcasting with a social development agenda – began across the continent. However, it has had difficulties with establishment, licensing and transmission, often lacking a sufficient understanding of and/or training in participatory



management and production processes and experiencing problems with sustainability. But its impact on national broadcasters has been felt. The latter have experienced a decrease in public funding as African states seek to limit public expenditure and have therefore sought advertising revenues from a market in which they are forced to compete with commercial broadcasters (and, in some instances, with successful community broadcasters). Most have done so by establishing wholly commercial broadcasters which may carry similar content to commercial broadcasters, but target specific sections of the public to cross-subsidize the national broadcasters. There have also been a few attempts at decentralization of the national broadcasters.

Therefore, on the one hand, the national broadcasters have been forced to implicitly recognise the diversity of the public. And, on the other hand, they have also been forced to implicitly acknowledge the need for public participation in public broadcasting. That noted, the contradiction between commercialization and the public service responsibility for the national broadcasters has not been sufficiently articulated. Sustaining the public service role of broadcasting requires political debates

and decisions. But in most countries in the region, little attention has been paid to the question. Financial autonomy has not everywhere been accompanied by ownership, management and operational autonomy. Related to this is the question of ownership and management of the national broadcasters' transmitters, transmission masts and sites.

Public broadcasters need to be clearly de-linked from government under autonomous, publicly appointed and accountable bodies with clear public service mandates. These mandates, as well as the criteria and processes for public nomination and appointment, need to be publicly debated and agreed upon. The need for and modalities of establishing public common carriers for the independent distribution of broadcasting transmissions also urgently requires public debate and resolution. In this process, due attention needs to be paid to ensuring the gender-responsiveness of the content of the public broadcasters as well as of the production, management and ownership structures which are evolving. The *African Charter on Broadcasting*<sup>4</sup> and the African Commission's *Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa* provide clear guidelines in this respect.<sup>5</sup>

### **Community broadcasting**

Today, the emphasis is also on how to build participatory communication that is two-way, enabling the expression of local perspectives, interpretations and solutions to the national, regional and international level and a constructive engagement between all levels. With such an emphasis, African women are seen not as the passive recipients of externally devised development solutions. We are instead seen as holders of information and both experiential and theoretical knowledge that the national, regional and international levels need in order to formulate policy decisions based on our own experiences, which make sense to us and which truly will make a difference to our lives.

A range of community broadcasters has thus emerged. Community broadcasters are participatory, community-based and community-managed broadcasters with a clear developmental agenda. However, although community broadcasters are evolving throughout the region, they are doing so in the absence of a regulatory framework which understands and explicitly supports them as distinct from commercial broadcasters and as complementary to the public broadcasters. Broadcast regulation in Africa ranges from being extremely flexible and open to being highly structured. Both extremes are conducive to community broadcasting. But the bulk of African states fall somewhere in between. This regulatory vacuum (allowing for private broadcasting, but without fundamental reform of the public broadcaster and without explicit support for community broadcasting) in the remaining states is a continuing cause for concern.

4 The *African Charter on Broadcasting* was adopted during the ten-year review of the *Windhoek Declaration on a Free and Pluralistic Media in Africa*, convened by UNESCO in 2001.

5 For more information, see Aida Opuku-Mensah, ed., *Up in the Air: The state of broadcasting in southern Africa*. Harare: Panos Southern Africa, 1998 and Lynne Muthoni Wanyeki, ed., *Up in the Air: The state of broadcasting in eastern Africa*. Harare, Panos Southern Africa, 2000. Also see publications by the World Radio and Television Council (WRTC) dealing with public service broadcasting.

## ICTs

The advent of ICTs has had an impact on the efforts to advance both communications initiatives of, from and for the African women's movement and gender mainstreaming within the African media. National and regional networking to share experiences and strategies within the African women's media has become cheaper, easier and faster as a result of ICTs and thus has been intensified. Several African women's organizations and networks now make use of online alerts to inform their regional counterparts of alarming developments with respect to gender in their own states, allowing for regional intervention. ICTs are also increasingly used for collective advocacy on issues of common concern across the region. Some African women's organizations and networks also produce more regular online bulletins and newsletters. These efforts have effectively provided the African media with accessible and alternative sources of content, both nationally and more importantly, regionally, thus mitigating somewhat the situation described above.<sup>6</sup>

ICTs have also facilitated more consistent networking nationally and regionally among African women within the media, with some positive results. The increased availability of comparative regional information has advanced advocacy work at the national level on the overall African media regulatory environment (laws and policies governing the media). Coalitions of media stakeholders (unions, development communication organizations, freedom of expression organizations and professional associations) have included key demands about participation and content around gender in many African states, basing their demands on the experiences of neighbouring or other regional states. A few media have adopted new in-house gender and sexual harassment policies. And the efforts of women within their respective media have led to interesting and useful partnerships with women's organizations in civil society to improve coverage of gender-related issues.

However, challenges exist to the replication of these initiatives across the continent. The more obvious challenges include infrastructure and regulatory concerns such as poor telecommunications connections and distribution, laws and policies that hinder universal access and the costs of both hardware and software. In addition, gender-based challenges exist. Discrimination against girls in education (particularly in mathematics, science and technology), persistent gender-based division of reproductive labour and women's limited access to and control over economic and technological resources further limit women's opportunities to engage with ICTs in ways that enhance our lives. The lack of gender-responsive regulation (laws and policies) around ICTs and telecommunications (even in the few African states where planning for universal access has taken place) is a major hindrance to equitable access to ICTs on the continent. Here again, the need for participation by women in regulatory bodies addressing ICTs and telecommunications needs to be stressed to ensure gender is brought to bear in regulatory work. For the funding mechanisms for universal access, the design and implementation of the telecentres previously

6 The importance of alternative sources of gender-responsive content from the region is noted in light of the previous reliance of most African media on externally-owned news agencies for information even about other African states.

seen as a model strategy for achieving universal access need also to be gendered to be of use to African women.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

Section J of the Beijing PFA outlined two initial and overarching strategies for improving the gender-responsiveness of the media with respect to the content of the media and participation within the media. It also noted the need for free, independent and pluralistic media at the service of development and social change. And finally, it stressed the need for self-regulation by the media, with women's full participation in the development of codes of conduct and self-regulatory mechanisms. These two strategic objectives remain relevant today. However, there is need for further elaboration.

A priority is to develop the infrastructure and regulation in respect to broadcasting, ICTs and telecommunications to reform public broadcasters and to actively support community broadcasters, paying due attention to gender. Ensuring the independence of public broadcasters is critical. Awareness needs to be raised about what community broadcasters are. Supportive training and sustainability mechanisms need to be evolved to assist the community broadcasters which already exist and to ensure more are established in underserved areas. And regulatory frameworks which cover the public broadcasters and also define and address the concerns of community broadcasters need to be established. Such frameworks should explicitly acknowledge and support community broadcasters, for example through scaled licensing fees, the reservation of a portion of the frequency spectrum for gendered rural access, cross-subsidization from commercial broadcasters.

With respect to ICTs, it must be noted that the economic benefits of the so-called Information Society derive not only from the consumption of ICTs, but from the production of ICTs. This point is particularly relevant to Africa, where advocacy efforts around ICTs have focused on ensuring access to ICTs, but not control of ICTs. Therefore, the need for investment into education, research and training for women in the fields of mathematics, science and technology noted earlier is even more important now. In addition, telecommunications regulation should ensure that infrastructure rollout includes practical strategies for gendered universal access,<sup>8</sup> for instance through universal access levies on private telecommunications providers and through credit schemes supporting infrastructure rollout through African women entrepreneurs and other similar schemes.

7 For more information, see *Engendering ICT Policy: Guidelines for Action*. Johannesburg: Africa Information Society (AIS)-Gender Working Group (GWG).

8 Universal access is a term developed by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as a standard to which all states must aspire. The term refers to the provision of a working telephone within a reasonable walking distance for all citizens. Universal access thus grounds advocacy for the provision of ICTs and telecommunications to all citizens.

# **Empowering women through ICTs: The WIT initiative in Lebanon**

Salam Yamout

In this paper, I will introduce the newly founded Lebanese NGO Women in Information Technology (WIT). I will examine some of the reasons that will motivate Lebanese women to learn to use information and communication technologies (ICTs) and identify some of the incentives for women in this respect, most notably economic incentives and incentives relating to traditional family choices. Lastly, I will briefly reflect on the significance of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) for our NGO.

## **Women in IT**

WIT is an association founded in Lebanon in 2005 by twelve women who hold senior management positions in the field of IT in Lebanon. They aim at sharing their success and experiences with others, focusing on using IT as a tool to improve the lives of all women. One of the main objectives of WIT is to spread the usage of ICTs and the Internet amongst all women.

Why women? Because ICTs are not amongst the traditional fields of interest of women. Lebanese women are still more attracted by social issues such as education, nursing, entertainment, etc. However, it is imperative that women understand the significance of these technologies, and start using them early on to avoid becoming the new illiterates of society. Computer illiteracy amongst women would have a devastating effect on society, because of the multiple roles of every woman (mother, educator, worker, social integrator, etc.). WIT is dedicated to the following important issues:

- Teaching ICT skills: Targeted training for all women on using computers, software applications, and the Internet.
- Accessing information: Finding solutions and safe places for women to access the Internet.
- Networking: Exchanging help and expertise with each other.
- Organizing events that benefit professional managerial women.
- Advocating women in leadership roles.
- Encouraging women and young girls to enroll in technological fields of study.

The scope of work of WIT is a challenge, because women's needs in terms of ICTs are as varied as their looks and names. For the low income woman, access to the Internet is a problem. Even if she has access to the Internet, would she be able to read and write English to understand the content? If she surmounts the above-mentioned difficulties, what would she be interested in? How can ICTs be of help to her?

For the traditional woman living in a conservative family, access to the Internet takes on another meaning. If there is a computer at home, would she be allowed to use it? Would her brothers, father, or sons have priority for using it? Would she be

allowed to go to the village “Internet Café” to access the Internet? How about a state-sponsored multi-media center?

The young woman who has just finished high school or technical school and who wishes to enter the workforce as an assistant, salesperson, or clerk might gain from any ICT literacy program, as it increases her chances of finding a job.

The woman working at home raising a family can use the Internet to end her isolation. She is the one who is perhaps most in need of ICT skills and Internet access because she is always in search of information (about vaccinations, school certificates, homework assignments, raising difficult children, diseases, parent support groups, hyperactivity, school curricula and programs, nearest football camp, etc.). She is also in search of part-time jobs to perform while her kids are at school. Finally, she might be interested in working from home.

The professional woman has her own challenges. She needs to remain competitive and prove herself in order to continue climbing up the career path. Her mastery of ICT software applications and tools may allow her to stay a step ahead of the pack.

In addition to the above, every country has its own specificities. Basically, the targets of WIT are the women of Lebanon, to ensure that access to the technologies can empower them in many aspects of their lives. It is one thing to say ICTs are good for you, and another to apply theoretical ideas and customize them to local needs. Grameen telephones of Bangladesh versus *boutiques d'information* of Burkina Faso; or data entry versus call centers, Lebanese projects must stem from Lebanese needs and lessons learned from international best practices.

So what is the situation in Lebanon in general and for women in particular? The Lebanese population compares very favorably with neighboring countries regarding the level of education of the general population. According to a study conducted in 2001 by Mrs. Choghig Kasparian of the St. Joseph University (USJ), the illiteracy rate for people ten years and older is 8%. For people below 20 years of age, the illiteracy rate is below 1%, which means that illiteracy has been virtually eradicated for boys and girls, principally through school enrollment.

The Lebanese population also compares very favorably with neighboring countries in respect to the standard of living. The Lebanese citizen usually speaks at least one foreign language and is open to cultural diversity and dialogues (East-West, Muslim-Christian, etc.) The Lebanese citizen is a fortune seeker and an avid entrepreneur. It is estimated that 12 million people claiming Lebanese origins (Lebanese Diaspora) live all around the globe.

Overall, Lebanon fares well among the Arab countries in what concerns the social indicators related to women. In the 1950s and 1960s, Lebanon led the Arab countries in the UNDP Human Development Index. Nowadays, it ranks consistently in the top five Arab countries concerning young girls' literacy rates, female attendance in universities, female reproductive health indicators, economic participation of women, freedom of action, etc. The Gulf Cooperation Countries, Tunisia, and the former Iraq are the other top ranking countries.

Lebanon is a small country where East meets West in many different and strange ways, ranging from gentle courtship to violent collisions. The Lebanese society in turn has integrated some advantages and some disadvantages of both value systems. The Lebanese woman consequently faces a social dilemma. On the one hand, she is urged to compete and seek ever higher incomes and social positions on her own.

And on the other hand, she is called to settle for the safety net provided by a traditional family setting in which she works at home and raises her children. In the way she presents herself, the Lebanese woman may either look like a fashion cover girl or she may revert to a more traditional dress code. The Lebanese woman's birth, marriage, and death rights are determined by her religion.<sup>1</sup> Her freedom of action and aspirations are determined by her upbringing and the educational level of her parents, and perhaps also their social class. "Everything goes." So in Lebanon, as in many other countries, gender issues are a mosaic of subtle heterogeneous conditions and not clear-cut. Consequently, WIT has decided to target different groups of women in its first phase of activities:

- Women active in social or women-related NGOs, who will in turn train and be able to assist women in rural areas.
- Young women (18–30 years old) with low skills and low income.
- Women working at home.

Women in these categories would benefit from ICTs in the following ways: In terms of jobs, they would be able to secure better entry level and/or part-time clerical or data entry jobs. In terms of capacity building, they could complement their university degrees earned long ago with skills enabling them to have better chances at re-entering the work force. They would also learn to access knowledge and information that they in turn could share with their sons and daughters, hence raising better-informed children. Further, they would understand the Internet and hence be able to communicate with their teenage children and bridge part of the parent-child divide. Mothers also need to control and/or be aware of the activities of their children on the Internet. Lastly, they would serve as models for their children ("Mommy is learning the computer, too").

### **Economic incentives for using ICT**

Women face similar challenges in their professional lives, such as balancing family and career, combining a soft feminine image with leadership qualities, gaining access to relevant information such as job openings, business opportunities, etc. Even though the founding members of WIT felt that the specificity of these women's needs was evident, their first challenge was to explain that WIT was not declaring war on men. The reaction of professional men to the founding of WIT was either very positive and encouraging, or immediately negative and confrontational, with nothing in between. One person even ventured that such an association is "degrading" for women. To the founding members' amazement, the reaction of professional women was similarly divided. Women either found the idea a natural one, or stated their rejection to being associated with a "feminist" association. In the end, WIT will prove itself by its objectives and not by slogans.

Lebanese women have naturally responded to economic opportunities when they presented themselves. Without the help of a state-sponsored policy or any program to increase female attendance at universities, Lebanese women have rightfully chosen to enter into some lucrative and stable careers previously dominated by men, such as medicine, the legal field (lawyers and judges), and the armed forces.

1 In Lebanon, there is no unified Lebanese Civil Code regulating civil status. Instead every religion follows its own laws regarding birth, adoption, marriage, divorce, death and inheritance.



ICTs are not amongst the traditional fields of interest for women in Lebanon. The Lebanese woman is still more attracted by traditional and stable careers such as teaching, banking, nursing, etc. ICTs have not (yet) captivated the interest of women and young girls. Through field work, WIT seeks to understand why. Are Lebanese women not yet aware that the ICT field is a sought-after and lucrative career? Or does the Lebanese woman perceive that ICT careers are demanding in terms of long hours, irregular hours, the need to continuously learn new methodologies and languages, etc.? Finally, do young girls feel that they do not have what it takes to pursue a technical career? While almost half of all Computer Sciences students in universities are females, only a handful of females choose Computer, Networking, and Communications Engineering.

Because ICTs are a meta career, all professions may benefit from it. Therefore, it is easier to sell the economic incentives offered by ICTs when it is pointed out that they complement other careers. Architecture, graphic design, accounting, technical drawing, music, dentistry, secretarial work, and correspondence are being shaped by ICTs. If people embrace the usage of ICTs in their regular daily routines, their jobs will necessarily benefit and hence will their income levels.

Lebanon has historically been a service-oriented economy, leading the Middle East in the provision of health, insurance, education, and commercial services. Within the service sector, the major employment for women has come in information processing jobs. Globally, these jobs are done almost entirely by women, probably because of the association of women with typing. Data entry and data gathering are at the low end of the skills requirements for teleworking. At the high end of both remuneration and entry requirements is software programming. In between are work in call centers, performing back-office functions, data conversion, medical transcription, content development, deposition summarizing, insurance claims processing, geographic information systems (GIS), and networking. Following data processing, other potential growth areas are data warehousing, business-to-business application, and call centers, which have similar possibilities and similar prerequisites to those of data entry.

### **Traditional family choices and ICTs**

WIT respects the choice that a woman makes when she stays home raising children. Unfortunately, the (Western) trend is to push women to work outside the home and to become “productive” members of society. In societies like Lebanon where staying home is still a socially and economically accepted choice, we feel that the Lebanese woman has the right to choose what is right for her without being pressured (one way or the other), or devalued. Women who have worked inside and outside the home can tell you that staying home is the harder of the two.

Instead of “looking down” on women working at home, or rewarding them only with speeches praising the sacrifice of mothers, decision-makers should provide incentives for women to work at home, such as continuing their social security benefits, giving access to rehabilitation and training programs, enrolling them in schools, etc. With respect to ICTs, it must be noted that women working at home are the primary caretakers of children, i.e. they are the primary providers of information to their children. If they do not have access to information, the knowledge of their children (boys and girls) will consequently also be limited.

WIT addresses women working at home as one of its primary targets for help and support. These women, too, need to learn how to incorporate the new technologies in their daily lives. If we want our children to use the Internet for more than chat, games, and pornography, we need to educate our mothers first. Mothers can point the way to meaningful content. Like reading a book together, mothers can surf the Internet together with their children. Finally, mothers need to feel comfortable with the technology in order to understand what their children are doing while using the computer. What are the children interested in? This is a great communication opener between parent and child, and the basis for healthy growing. Mothers might even need to control their children's activities on the Internet by applying a content filter just like they apply a child lock on the TV.

In short, the mother working at home should not be barred entry to the Information Society just because she does not fit the Western profile for women needing help and support (low income, rural, etc.). We feel that this woman is an important part of the Lebanese society and the society at large will undoubtedly benefit from her ICT enlightenment.

### **The impact of WSIS**

Developing countries, poor and small countries were told to join the Information Society or die. They were also told that developed countries are genuinely interested in closing the "digital divide" between the "haves" and the "have-nots." An umbrella – the Declarations of Principles and the Plan of Action – for the issues related to the Information Society was drafted and agreed upon.

Women's issues, or gender issues as they are called, have been included under this umbrella. A wealth of literature around this topic has appeared on the web. Was the interest in WSIS a reflection of a need, or was the literature a response to WSIS? In any case, as far as women's issues are concerned, WSIS has validated the basic instinct of a few Lebanese women who wanted to make a difference, even though they did not fully comprehend the jargon used in many of the WSIS reports.

On the negative side is the question of culture. Is the WSIS vision a recipe for universal culture? Is the woman in that culture one flavor (one who stands on the "have-not" side of the digital divide, one who must be low income and living in rural areas)? Will a woman who does not fit these criteria still be allowed to have a "gender issue"? Must all women in the world start jumping more hoops to become more and more like men, choosing the same means of production, and choosing the same values?

On the positive side is the question of finding resources. Literature surrounding gender issues has flourished on the World Wide Web. Issues have been explained, as well as lessons learned and examples from various countries seen. The international debate on ICT issues has increased since phase one of WSIS in Geneva. If dialog and awareness are the first steps for action, WSIS has succeeded in mobilizing, at least in Lebanon, a few women willing and eager to help other, less "digitized" ones.



## Appendices



## About the authors

**Karen Banks** is the networking and advocacy coordinator of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). Her work in the early 1990s was focused on supporting the creation of small e-mail hosts in southern countries, which provided the means for networks to strengthen their communication, coordination and advocacy through computer-facilitated communication. Karen's interests progressively became more acutely focused on women's needs and perspectives in relation to ICTs. In 1995, she was part of a team of 40 women who provided on-site Internet access to the delegates at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Thereafter, she coordinated the APC Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP) until 2004. Currently, she is in charge of APC's international policy advocacy work, which includes the participation in WSIS, as well as collaborations amongst APC's 40 member organizations around the world. Karen was a member of the WSIS Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) and remains actively involved in the WSIS Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus.



**Essia Belhassen** is a co-founder and board member of the *Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates* (ATFD). Responsible for information and communication issues, she coordinates the ATFD's participation in WSIS, where she is an active member of the Gender Caucus. Essia is a founding member of a centre for women victims of violence and has been the first at ATFD – in 1993 – to campaign and share knowledge about AIDS. She is the vice-president of a local chapter of the Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH) and member of the solidarity committee against war and for peace of *El Taller International*, an organization committed to strengthening civil society networks in Southern countries. She has experience as a civil servant, in labour rights training and as a trade union representative. Essia has published in several alternative newspapers and worked on documentary films dealing with women and media.

**Sally Burch** is a British journalist, based in Ecuador since 1983. At present, she is executive director of the *Agencia Latinoamericana de Información* (ALAI), a communications organization linked to social movements, with which she has been associated since 1977. During the first phase of WSIS, she was joint coordinator of the civil society Content and Themes Group that produced the Geneva Civil Society Declaration. Between 1993 and 1995, Sally worked as world coordinator of the



Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP), which has played an outstanding role in linking women to ICTs. Over more than a decade, Sally has counselled various organizations of women's and other social movements on strategic use of ICTs for networking. Sally is co-author of several books and has published numerous articles that relate to the democratization of communication and introduce a gender perspective.

**Beatriz Busaniche** is a graduate in Social Communication of the National University of Rosario, Argentina. She works with the *Fundación Vía Libre*, a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of Free Software as a fundamental tool for sustainable development. Beatriz is a founding member of the Free Software Foundation Latin America (FSFLA), a sister organization of the U.S. American, Indian and European chapters. For many years, Beatriz has been concentrating on the impacts and implications of new technologies on education and labour, while specifically dedicating the last several years to the question of use, development and implementation of Free Software and the impact of patent and copyright norms in the areas of culture and society. She participated in the first WSIS phase as the focal point of the Education Family and she was a member of the Civil Society Bureau: she worked in the Latin American Caucus as well as in the Working Group on Patents, Copyrights and Trademarks.



**Avri Doria**, presently based in the USA and Sweden, has been a technical contributor to the development of the Internet for over 20 years and is a long-time participant in the International Engineering Task Force (IETF). Her introduction to the area of Internet governance came several years ago when she was working on a connectivity project initiated by a group of semi-nomadic Sámi women in Sweden. Since that time, Avri has been involved in various governance processes including the WSIS Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), the WSIS Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus and the Internet Society's (ISOC) Public Policy working group. Currently, Avri works as research consultant on various development projects in the region of Sapmi in the Arctic Rim and is completing her Ph.D. dissertation in Techno-politics in the Department of Humanities, Social Science and Technology of the Blekinge University of Technology, Sweden.

**Rikke Frank Jørgensen** heads the Team on Freedoms and Rights at the Danish Institute for Human Rights in Copenhagen. She is an adviser to the Danish governmental delegation at WSIS and co-chairs the WSIS Civil Society Human Rights Caucus. She has previously worked as a special adviser in the Danish Ministry of Research and Information Technology, dealing with social impacts of information technology. She co-founded the Danish non-governmental organization Digital Rights and is on the board of European Digital Rights (EDRI). Rikke has been a member of several governmental committees, and has authored a number of presentations and articles on the interface between human rights and technology. She holds a Master's degree in Information Science and a European Master's degree in Human Rights and Democratization.



**Divina Frau-Meigs** is professor of Media Sociology at the *Université Paris 3 – Sorbonne* in France. With degrees from the Sorbonne University, Stanford University and the Annenberg School for Communications of the University of Pennsylvania, she became a specialist of media and information technology policies and uses. She is a research associate with the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (CNRS) in the Social Uses of Technology and Communication Policy department and vice-president of the International Association for Media and Communications Research (IAMCR). Divina has published extensively in the areas of media content, technologies and subcultures of the screen and addressed the relationship between media, technology and society. As consultant and expert for the UNESCO, the European Union and several French governmental agencies, she is also involved in the Mentor Project “Media Education in the Mediterranean.” From the beginning, Divina has been involved in WSIS as coordinator of the Education, Academia and Research Taskforce and is a member of the Civil Society Bureau. She is currently working on issues of cultural diversity and acculturation in a cross-cultural perspective.



**Anita Gurumurthy**, from India, is a founding member and the executive director of IT for Change, managing the organization's overall activities and engaging in research, advocacy and partnership-building efforts in the information and communication technologies for development (ICTD) sector. With over 15 years of experience working with grassroots NGOs, Anita has written extensively on issues of development, gender, health, globalization and civil society, as well as on information and communication. Anita is a member of the Steering



Committee of the WSIS Gender Caucus. She has recently authored the *Bridge Cutting Edge Pack on Gender* published by the Institute for Development Studies, Sussex, and has also led the study *Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Issues and Insights on ICT for Women's Economic Empowerment*, for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Anita is a member of the standing committee of the government of India's ICTD programme and is also associated with the work of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN).

**Heike Jensen** is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the Department of Gender Studies of Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, where she also obtained her doctorate. Her teaching and research foci are media theories, media politics and media strategies, women's movements and women's organizations, and globalization and global governance. Heike's volunteer work is dedicated to promoting women. She is a member of many NGOs, from *Terre des Femmes* at the national level to the Association of Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP) and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) at the global level. In the WSIS process, Heike has worked with the German Civil Society Coordinating Group, the NGO Gender Strategies Working Group and the WSIS Gender Caucus, where she is a member of the Steering Committee. Heike was a civil society representative in the German governmental delegation attending the Geneva summit, and she coordinated the European/North American Regional Conference on Gender and WSIS.



**Viola Krebs**, from Australia, is the founder and director of ICVolunteers, an international non-governmental organization that connects volunteers from 60 countries with non-profit projects. Viola is the focal point of the Volunteer Family in the Civil Society Bureau of WSIS. She has coordinated and chaired the International Symposium on Volunteering in 2001, where representatives from 126 countries came together in Geneva, and she co-edited the final publication as well as the publication of an online

library on volunteerism and ICTs. In the past, she has worked for the People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), the World Economic Forum and Merrill Lynch and was for several years a volunteer teacher at the *Université Ouvrière de Genève*. Viola holds a Master's degree in Communications and Media and is currently working on a Ph.D. focusing on "The Impact of the Internet on Volunteers, Volunteering and Volunteerism."



**Meryem Marzouki** is a senior researcher with the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (CNRS), currently with the Computer Science Laboratory of Paris 6 (LIP6). Addressing relationships between ICTs, public policies and the public space following a multi-disciplinary approach, her current research interests include Internet governance, human rights and the transformation of the rule of law. As part of her volunteering activities, Meryem is the president of the French NGO *Imaginons un réseau Internet solidaire* (IRIS) and has co-chaired the Civil Society Human Rights Caucus at WSIS. Meryem is the author of several publications and has given talks on Internet governance, human rights and democracy as part of both her scientific and NGO activities.

**Jacqueline Morris**, based in Trinidad and Tobago, was trained as a chemical engineer. She became involved in the Internet in the early 1990s while working on a Master's degree at the Rensseler Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York and also while working at GE Plastics. Returning to Trinidad and Tobago, she started mentoring young women and getting them acquainted with ICTs and the technology field in general. She followed up on this work with the help of a Fulbright Fellowship in 2000–2001, working with the Women's Technology Cluster in San Francisco, California. As one of the early members of the WSIS Gender Caucus, she has been involved in the WSIS process since 2003 and was later invited to join the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG). She currently works on projects that use Internet technologies to market and promote local Caribbean cultural products.



**Nnenna Nwakanma**, based in Ivory Coast, holds a triple Bachelor in Social Sciences, History and Religion and a Master's degree in International Law and Relations. She has worked for the Home Health Education Service, the Helen Keller Foundation and the African Development Bank as an information, documentation and relations officer. Nnenna is co-founder of various pan-African organizations such as the Free Software and Open Source Foundation for Africa (FOSSFA), the Africa Network of Information Society Actors (ANISA), and the African Civil Society for the Information Society (ACSIS). In WSIS, she represents the African Civil Society on the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) and advises on the Africa Information Society Initiative (AISII). At present, Nnenna works as a consultant to governments, civil society organizations, business entities and international development organizations on various domains of expertise in African development.





**Tracey Naughton**, based in South Africa, has worked in community informatics as a producer and policy advocate for 25 years. Working in diverse settings and in less developed contexts in Australia, including aboriginal communities, many African countries as well as in Mongolia, her work is always underpinned by a community development approach that emphasises self-determination, and it perceives ICTs as appropriate tools for participant readiness and for social appropriation. Tracey is currently civil society advisor to the Institute for the Information Society of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town, South Africa. Involved in WSIS since its conceptualization, she has been the chair of the Civil Society Media Caucus and Convenor of the Civil Society Bureau.

**Claudia Padovani** is a researcher in Political Science and International Relations at the Department of Historical and Political Studies of the University of Padova, Italy. She teaches international communication and governance and institutions of communication. Claudia conducts research in the field of global and European governance of the information and knowledge society. She is particularly interested in the role of civil society organizations and transnational social movements as stakeholders in global decision-making processes. From this perspective, she has followed the WSIS process closely and written extensively about this experience. She is a member of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) and of the international campaign Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS).



**Chantal Peyer** studied History, Political Science and Science of Religion at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland and conducted a one-year social and anthropological field research in Varanasi, India that she used towards her dissertation on Hindu rituals. She has been working for Bread for All since 2000 and was appointed to the position of policy development officer in 2002. A specialist on topics related to the Information Society, Chantal is a founding member – and now co-president – of the Swiss Civil Society Coalition Communica-ch. She was a civil society representative to the official Swiss delegation during the first phase of WSIS and is a member of the WSIS Informal Coalition on Financing.



**L. Muthoni Wanyeki**, based in Kenya, is a political scientist who works in development communications, gender and human rights. She is the executive director of the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), a pan-African membership organization set up in 1988 and based in Nairobi, Kenya. FEMNET works towards African women's development, equality and other human rights through advocacy at the regional and international levels, training on gender analysis and mainstreaming, and communications. Muthoni is also deputy president of the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC-Africa), sits on the Regional Advisory Board of Article 19 and is a member of the Media Council of Kenya.

**Salam Yamout**, from Lebanon, is an ICT professional. She obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Valparaiso University, Indiana in 1985, her Master's degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering from the University of Arizona in 1987, and her Master of Business Administration in 2005 from the *Ecole Supérieure des Affaires* (ESA) in Lille, France. Since returning to Lebanon, Salam has worked on several key national projects for the Ministry of Economy (National e-commerce project), UNDP (National e-strategy project), Ministry of Administrative Reform (National ICT Standards project), European Union (ELCIM program), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and the private sector. She is now programme manager for Cisco Systems. Salam is a member of the Lebanese national committee for WSIS and the founder and president of Women in IT (WIT), an NGO dedicated to spreading the use of ICTs among all women in Lebanon.



## An overview: The WSIS process and civil society constituencies \*

The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) taking the lead role in preparations. For the first time in a UN summit, all relevant stakeholders, most notably civil society and the private sector, were invited to participate in the intergovernmental preparatory process and the summit itself. Also in contrast to earlier world summits, it was decided to hold WSIS in two phases. The first summit took place in Geneva from 10–12 December 2003 and the second summit in Tunis from 16–18 November 2005.

The objective of the **Geneva phase** was to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and take concrete steps to establish the foundations for an Information Society, reflecting all the different interests at stake. There were two official outcome documents:

- The *Declaration of Principles*, which contains the underlying 11 key principles of the “common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society.”
- The *Plan of Action*, which translates the common vision and guiding principles of the Declaration into 11 “action lines.”

The civil society groups involved in WSIS did not see their concerns and ideas adequately recognized in the official documents and at the Geneva Summit presented their own political statement *Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs*.

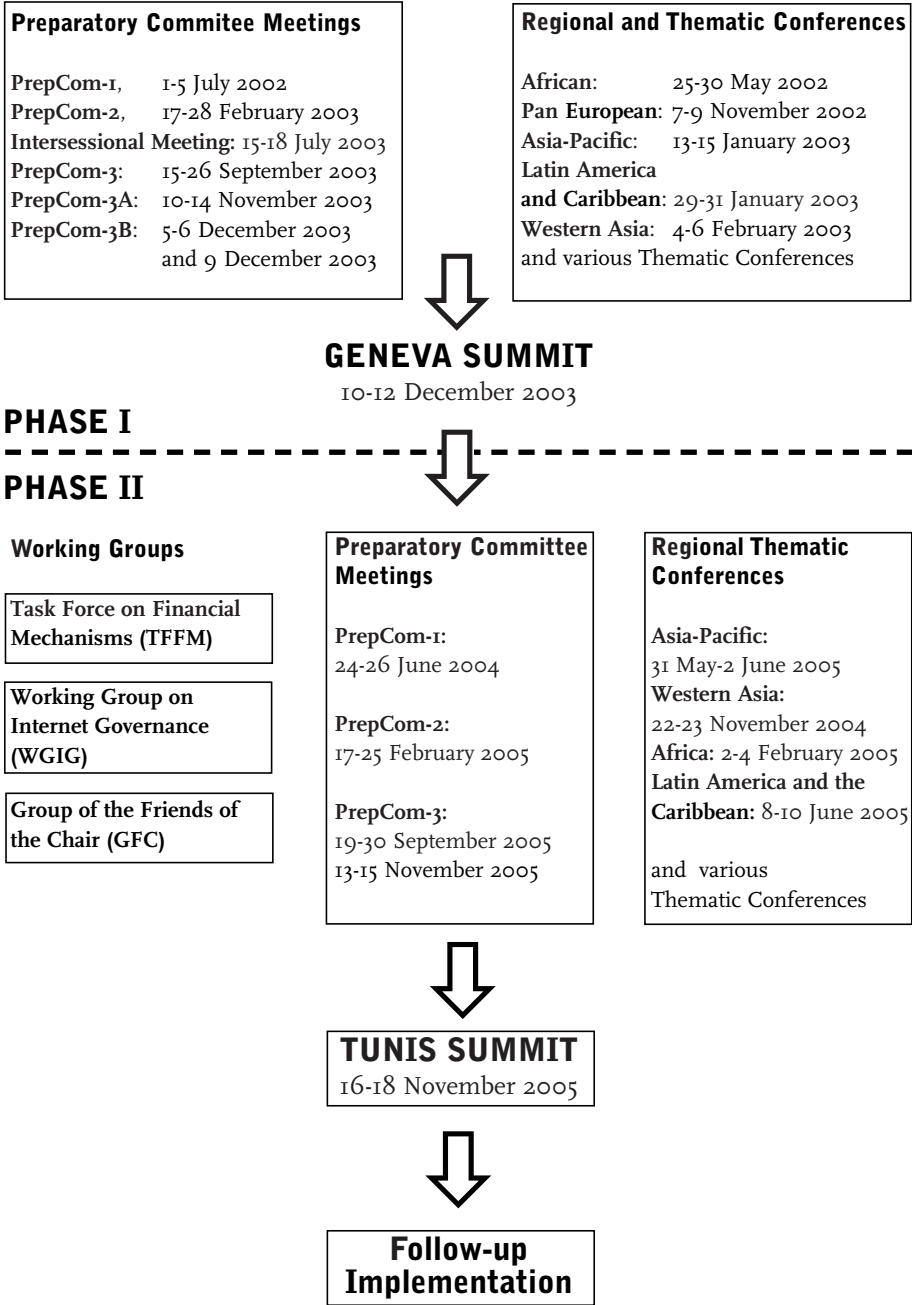
The negotiations in the **Tunis phase** have been focused on the two major controversial issues, Internet Governance and financing mechanisms to overcome the digital divide, as well as on the design of the WSIS follow-up process. Two working groups have prepared the ground for the negotiations and delivered their reports in 2005:

- The *Task Force on Financial Mechanisms* (TFFM) under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted a review of the adequacy of existing financing mechanisms to meet the challenges of ICT for development.
- The *Working Group on Internet Governance* (WGIG) was mandated to develop a definition of Internet Governance, to identify the relevant public policy issues and to enhance a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. Mandated to work “in an open and inclusive process” the WGIG was constituted by representatives of all stakeholders, representing thus an innovative model of a multi-stakeholder body within the UN system.

\* Editor's note: This overview builds on the “WSIS Orientation Kit” released by the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) and the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) and has been reworked for the purposes of this publication.

In the preparatory process, a substantial number of Preparatory Committee meetings (PrepCom), thematic and regional conferences have taken place. To expedite the negotiations the Group of the Friends of the Chair (GFC) and other working groups were established, which have been partially open to the non-governmental observers.

**WSIS Process**



## Civil society constituencies

In WSIS civil society was organized in numerous constituencies such as **caucuses**, **working groups** and “**families**,” which represented regional perspectives, different communities or thematic priorities. These groups, some working continually for a long time, while others only for a shorter time, have been developing their positions and interventions in meetings alongside the conferences and by communicating virtually. The following incomplete list exemplifies the plurality of civil society communities and concerns in WSIS:

*Thematic working groups/caucuses:* Human Rights; Internet Governance; Privacy and Security; Patents, Copyright and Trademarks; Scientific Information; Community Media; Cultural Diversity; NGO Gender Strategies; E-Government/E-Democracy; Education and Academia; Environment and ICTs; Financing Mechanisms; Health and ICTs; Values and Ethics.

*Regional caucuses:* Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America, Western Asia and the Middle East, Arab Caucus.

*“Families”/caucuses:* Education, Academia and Research; Gender; Indigenous People; Media; NGOs; Grassroots and Social Movements; People with Disabilities; Cities and Local Authorities; Foundations and Philanthropic Institutions; Science and Technology Community; Trade Unions; Volunteers; Youth.

At PrepCom-2 of phase I, the assembly of civil society participants, the **Civil Society Plenary (CSP)**, endorsed the terms of reference for the constitution of a Civil Society Bureau and a Content & Themes Group. Through daily meetings during the conferences and the virtual electronic forum (plenary mailing list), the CSP has functioned as the main civil society information, coordination and decision-making body, promoting greater transparency in the organization of civil society in the WSIS process.

In daily meetings of the **Content and Themes Group (CT)**, civil society has coordinated its work on content-related issues, by setting up drafting groups, nominating speakers and facilitating agreement on statements based on the domain expertise and competence of the caucuses and working groups.

The **Civil Society Bureau (CSB)** has functioned as an interlinkage between civil society and the intergovernmental WSIS Bureau, with regard to operational and logistical needs, procedures and has been committed to enhancing interactions between civil society and other stakeholders. The CSB is constituted by “focal points” representing different constituencies and reports regularly to the CS Plenary.

Aiming to achieve its full participation and enhance transparency of the WSIS process, civil society has protested several times against the exclusion of the observers from the official negotiations.



**Visions in Process II, launched at the second UN-World Summit on the Information Society in November 2005, features civil society assessments of major controversies regarding the agenda and the process of this summit.**

**The Heinrich Böll Foundation is committed to fostering understanding of the challenges the WSIS has been dealing with and to promoting civil society perspectives.**

**[www.worldsummit2005.org](http://www.worldsummit2005.org) offers background information reports and latest news and provides a common platform for civil society networking.**

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