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**PANEL ON PROMOTING THE BUILDING OF A PEOPLE-CENTRED,
DEVELOPMENT-ORIENTED AND INCLUSIVE INFORMATION
SOCIETY**

6–8 November 2006
UNESCO headquarters
Paris, France

Summary report prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat*

* This paper summarizes the Panel's discussions; it does not necessarily reflect the views of the UNCTAD secretariat.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which took place in two phases in 2003 and 2005, adopted a common vision and commitment to building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society,

"Where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights."¹

2. The Geneva Summit in 2003 adopted a Plan of Action, which seeks to translate that vision into concrete objectives, goals and targets, to be met by 2015, along a series of Action Lines and main themes. In recognition of the unremitting multi-stakeholder effort required at all levels in order to achieve those objectives, the Tunis Summit in 2005 established a mechanism for implementation and follow-up at national, regional and international levels.

3. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was requested by the Tunis Summit to oversee the UN system-wide follow-up of the outcomes of the Geneva and Tunis phases of the Summit. To that end, ECOSOC was requested to review the mandate of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), including considering its strengthening, taking into account the multi-stakeholder approach.²

4. ECOSOC, during its substantive session in July 2006, adopted a resolution³ which requests the Commission to review and assess the progress made in implementing the outcomes of the Summit and advise the Council thereon, including through the elaboration of recommendations to the Council aimed at furthering the implementation of the Summit outcomes; the Commission is required to:

- Review and assess progress at the international and regional levels in the implementation of Action Lines, recommendations and commitments contained in the outcome documents of WSIS;
- Share best and effective practices and lessons learned, and identify obstacles and constraints encountered, actions and initiatives to overcome them and important measures for further implementation of WSIS outcomes;
- Promote dialogue and foster partnerships in coordination with other appropriate UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies to contribute to the attainment of the WSIS objectives and implementation of its outcomes, and to use ICT for development and the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, with the participation of Governments, the private sector, civil society and the UN and other international organizations in accordance with their different roles and responsibilities.

¹ A1, "Our Common Vision of the Information Society", Geneva Declaration of Principles.

² Para. 105, Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.

³ E/2006/46.

5. The resolution also requested the Commission to develop an agenda and a multi-year work programme at its tenth session, scheduled to take place in May 2007.

6. Against that background, the Commission decided to consider, at its intersessional Panel meeting held in Paris in November 2006, the substantive theme for the tenth session, namely “Promoting the building of a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society”, in the context of its new mandate for the follow-up to the WSIS outcomes. The outcome of the panel meeting is to provide input into the report of the Secretary-General to the Commission at its tenth session.

7. The Panel discussed how ICT firms in developing countries could enhance their strategic competitiveness by becoming more effective in technological learning and capability-building efforts. It drew on the experiences of those countries that have been able to build an indigenous human resources capacity in ICTs, which has enabled them to become internationally competitive in software development and high-technology exports. The Panel also considered ICT use and diffusion in developing countries, and the barriers and obstacles thereto, as well as key factors and multi-stakeholder approaches in developing appropriate strategies to promote the use and diffusion of ICTs.

II. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. Attendance

8. The CSTD Panel meeting for the intersessional period 2006–2007 was held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris from 6 to 8 November 2006. It was attended by over 50 participants, including members of the Commission, other national representatives and representatives of NGOs, the private sector and academia. Also present were seven resource persons: Ambassador Jānis Kārklīns, President of the Prepcom WSIS Tunis phase; Mr. Michel Bon, former President of France Telecom and current CEO of Devoteam; Mr. Abdul Waheed Khan, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO; Ms. Renate Bloem, President of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the United Nations; Prof. Thomas Andersson, President of the board of the International Organisation for Knowledge Economy and Enterprise Development (IKED) and President of Jönköping University, Sweden; Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh, IT for Change, Bangalore, India; and Mr. Charles Geiger, Executive Director of the WSIS secretariat (see annex I for the full list of participants).

B. Documentation

9. The documentation of the meeting consisted of an issues paper prepared by the secretariat and printed copies of the presentations made at the meeting. All the documentation has been posted online at the Science and Technology for Development Network (STDev), <http://www.unctad.org/stdev>.

III. OPENING STATEMENTS

10. Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, and Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, opened the meeting of the Panel. Mr. Matsuura pointed out that information and communication technologies were not an end in themselves, but powerful tools

for improving human welfare. In that context, UNESCO had elaborated the concept of “knowledge societies”, which rested on four key principles: freedom of expression; universal access to information and knowledge; respect for cultural and linguistic diversity; and quality education for all. The digital divide was not merely technological; rather, it expressed and compounded more fundamental human and social inequities. One of the most important achievements of WSIS had been to show that the information revolution was embedded in larger social processes — in science, in education and in culture. The Summit had led to a new, more integrated and more holistic vision of the information society. The challenge now was to ensure that that vision was acted upon and translated into reality. UNESCO’s relationship with CSTD would be of great importance for ensuring coherence in the WSIS follow-up. The Panel, he said, provided a most welcome opportunity to build synergies.

11. Mr. Matsuura highlighted the importance of ensuring coherence within the UN system, especially in areas such as ICTs, where the complexity and far-reaching nature of the issue demanded multi-stakeholder intervention. He stressed the need for greater synergy and coherence among agencies, with the full range of expertise across the UN still being drawn on. In that context, he encouraged closer collaboration between CSTD, UNESCO and UNCTAD on work related to centres of excellence and Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) reviews. He noted that UNESCO had built up considerable expertise, competence and experience in those areas over the years, and said that closer collaboration would ensure that those initiatives were aligned and drew on past experience and good practices.

12. He emphasized the need to reinforce collaboration in Africa. The most urgent development needs were in Africa, and science and technology could have the greatest leveraging effect. UNESCO and UNCTAD already collaborated closely within the UN Cluster for Science and Technology in support of the new Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). They were also actively engaged in preparations for the 2007 African Union summit on science and technology. He pointed out, however, that there was still room for greater harmonization of UN action in Africa.

13. In conclusion, Mr. Matsuura said that effective cooperation in those areas would impact considerably on the WSIS follow-up. The work on ICTs should be fully integrated with the work in more traditional fields of science and technology. The Panel meeting thus provided an opportunity to strengthen cooperation in that area, and to reflect on how the WSIS follow-up could be linked with other development frameworks and activities.

14. Dr. Supachai emphasized the crucial importance of ICT for development and the unprecedented abundance of possibilities offered by those technologies, including the prospects for reducing the inequality between developed and developing countries. ICTs were likely to have the greatest effect on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly since its impact was just beginning to be felt. Moreover, there was the often-cited “ripple effect”, whereby progress in computing provided a foundation for innovation in such fields as wireless communications and genomics.

15. Dr. Supachai pointed out that the cost of being left behind was extraordinarily high, given that the range of applications of ICTs was greater than that of any other revolutionary technology in history. Nations that were unable to access ICTs or use them efficiently were exposed to ever-increasing development gaps. Bridging the digital divide had thus become a fundamental

concern for international policymakers. In spite of the recent progress in developing countries in bridging the digital divide, the gap remained wide between nations, regardless of the measure used. There were domestic digital divides between urban and rural areas, genders, age groups and racial groups. However, there were also signs that ICT diffusion was slowly becoming more evenly balanced.

16. Dr. Supachai reported on a number of concrete steps he had taken to significantly strengthen UNCTAD's work on science and technology, including ICTs. He had set up a Science and Technology Board, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-general of UNCTAD, to ensure overall coordination of UNCTAD's work in that area across all divisions and programmes. The Board would be the central decision-making mechanism in matters related to science, technology and ICTs, in the lead-up to UNCTAD XII. He called for greater synergies between UNCTAD, CSTD and UNESCO. He also stressed that the follow-up to WSIS should form an integral part of the integrated follow-up to all major UN conferences and summits, and to the broader policy debates within the UN system and beyond.

IV. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Building a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society

17. The UNCTAD secretariat presented an issues paper on the substantive theme. In particular, the paper identified three factors that contributed to the digital divide. The first of those was the high cost of telecommunications, especially the high cost of international bandwidth, while the second was the lack of human resources and the brain drain. The global shortage of ICT experts had led to an increase in international migration to the industrialized countries. The brain drain constituted a real challenge for developing countries, especially in Africa. Studies estimated that Africa lost about 20,000 skilled personnel a year to developed countries. The third factor was the lack of relevant content. Much of the concern about the digital divide had been focused on technology, hardware and connectivity. While these issues were important, lack of relevant content was a new dimension of the digital divide, which deserved policy attention.

18. The paper set out some of the benefits and risks associated with ICTs and the role of policy in maximizing benefits and minimizing risks.

19. The issues paper also underlined the importance of financing ICT for development. It argued that foreign direct investment (FDI) was one of the important sources of financing for ICT. FDI had become an important source of financing for ICT infrastructure and ICT capabilities in many developing countries, and all indications were that this trend was likely to become more pronounced in the years ahead. For countries such as those in Africa, FDI has the potential to provide and leverage the resources — the skilled people, technologies and capital — required in order to build and maintain a solid foundation for ICTs. In that context, the paper identified a number of factors that usually constrain investment, including outmoded regulatory regimes, needlessly complex taxation and other business-governance systems, limits on the ownership shares that foreign private investors can hold in ICT ventures, and preferential treatment for State-owned enterprises.

ICT policy: A bottom-up and multi-stakeholder approach

20. In the ensuing discussion, participants observed that ICTs were neither an end in themselves nor a panacea for development. ICT sector development was important, however, it could not automatically lead to poverty reduction. There was concern that the promotion of ICTs had overemphasized the technologies themselves, thus giving rise to unrealistic expectations in poor countries. The mere presence of ICTs did not automatically mean that appropriate knowledge was available or would emerge from a better exchange of information. There was general consensus that the emphasis should therefore be on ICT as a tool for development, especially in facilitating the implementation of policies and measures aimed at reducing social and economic disparities and in promoting human development in general.

21. Participants stressed several essential elements in the building of a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society. One of the most important was democratic governance. The success of any policy initiative based on intensive use of ICTs depends on the participation of all citizens during its formulation, implementation and decision-making process. Accountability and transparency are also crucial, especially with regard to the choice of technological infrastructure to be used by a certain community, so that the technology chosen can adequately respond to the community's needs and interests. All ICT-related policy design should adopt a bottom-up and multi-stakeholder approach, and all projects must embody a commitment to development at community level, especially the rural community.

22. Such initiatives should be backed by e-government projects, which deliver quality public services through electronic means. For many people in underdeveloped areas, having access to public services such as online document issuance or social security registration is a first step towards social and digital inclusion and to becoming full citizens.

23. Participants drew attention to traditional ICTs, such as radio and TV, which were more diffused compared with some of the new ICTs. They argued that, with the expected convergence of technologies, Internet, TV and voice, those traditional ICTs had the potential to bring about fundamental changes to development. Several participants recommended the use of free and open source software (FOSS) in the delivery of e-government services and digital inclusion projects.

Bridging the digital divide: Private and public partnerships

24. Several panellists pointed out that the digital divide is symptomatic of the development gap. However, the present gap has ominous implications for modern production, trade in high-technology products, the possession and use of consumer products, research and development (R&D), and reciprocal flows of vital information.

25. One panellist identified some of the common constraints related to ICTs in poor countries as the following: poverty, the low level of literacy and quantitative skills, inadequate science and technology awareness, lack of understanding of ICTs, fragmented information infrastructures, weak and skewed knowledge systems, costly infrastructure and access to ICTs, incoherent policies/plans/strategies, and insufficient funding possibilities. He went on to suggest the following key factors for making ICT work for the poor:

- Less costly laptop computers, cellular phones and connection charges;
- Wireless to overcome terrain and fixed infrastructural problems in rural areas;

- Technologies more attuned to agricultural production, storage and marketing;
- Access to information centres and free access to the Internet;
- Maintenance of instruments and networks;
- Improved literacy, skills, critical thinking and computing;
- Relevant quality information and R&D;
- Appropriate laws, regulations, policies, attitudes and trust.

26. Several participants observed that the market was an imperfect mechanism for delivering essential communications services. The creation, innovation and diffusion of such technologies have, and will, gravitate towards business models that maximize return on investment. The reliance on market forces alone has not led to the uptake of those technologies for the lasting benefit of the world's poor. In that regard, public funding is needed in order to fill in the gaps. Also important is the need to invest in capacity-building and provide social services.

27. Several participants called for a coalition of financial and human resources, which would take the form of cooperation among firms in the developed and developing countries, and partnerships among Governments, multilateral bodies, financial institutions and other international organizations, which were required in order to fill the development gap. They also noted that it was important to seek innovative measures that would induce all the relevant actors to "pull" technologies, instead of waiting for technologies to "push" in a piecemeal fashion.

28. Participants stressed the important role that the private sector can play in leveraging technology, skills and finance. However, the public-private balance is crucial in building an information society. Although the success of mobile telephony attests to the importance of private-sector-led development, adequate public policy is crucial in increasing Internet access and in building the information society in general. Participants pointed out that public telecom monopoly was bad, as was private rent-seeking based on capture of technology standards. They rejected the argument that ICT development was the responsibility of the private sector, and argued that a wide range of policy options was needed in situations where the public sector played an essential role. Participants also discussed the important issue of public "commons".⁴ They observed that the information society needed more global governance, rather than less. This governance should be participative, democratic and accountable. They also highlighted the need for governance innovation, which would seek to maintain the balance between public and private interest. Also emphasized was the importance of donor and development assistance. A resource person briefed the participants on recent public-private efforts to establish a Global Trust Centre,⁵ the objective of which was to improve security and create trust in information economies.

Follow-up to WSIS and the role of CSTD

29. Ambassador Jānis Kārklīnš, President of the WSIS Prepcom Tunis Phase, gave a comprehensive overview of post-WSIS activities, including implementation at national, regional and international levels. He noted that the follow-up should focus on WSIS outcomes from the

⁴ For example, the open access regime, which includes open source software and the like.

⁵ <http://www.globaltrustcenter.com/>

Geneva and Tunis phases of the Summit, which included the implementation of the 11 Action Lines defined in Geneva as well as tasks defined in the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (TAIS) related to effective use of existing and future financial mechanisms. He stressed that by concentrating only on the Action Lines of the Geneva Plan of Action, the CSTD could miss out on recommendations of the Tunis Agenda on financial mechanisms.

30. Ambassador Kārklīnš noted that in order to carry out its new mandate of system-wide follow-up to WSIS, CSTD should collaborate closely with three other parallel processes at the international level, described below.

A. UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS)

31. UNGIS was established by the UN Secretary-General within the United Nations Chief Executive Board (CEB). It is made up of 22 UN funds, programmes and agencies, and will work under the rotating chairmanship of ITU, UNESCO and UNDP. It will enable synergies aimed at resolving substantive and policy issues, avoiding redundancies and enhancing the effectiveness of the UN system while raising public awareness about the goals and objectives of the global information society. To maximize its efficiency, it has agreed on a work plan whereby it would concentrate its collective efforts each year on one or two cross-cutting themes and on a few selected countries.

32. UNGIS will seek to bring the efforts of the UN system to bear on expanding access to communications, for instance through multimedia community centres, tele-shops, and so forth. Drawing on the respective competencies of its members, UNGIS will also focus on applications related to e-health and e-tourism. It will examine the e-readiness strategies and policies of one or two countries, to be proposed by UNDP, to develop a comprehensive toolkit for bringing the benefits of the information society to developing countries.

B. Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development (GAID)

33. The launch of GAID was approved in April 2006. Its mission is to facilitate and promote the use of ICTs in the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals by providing a platform for an open, inclusive multi-stakeholder cross-sectoral policy dialogue on the role of information and communication technology in development. At its inaugural meeting in July 2006, participants suggested that GAID focus on the following key priority areas that were considered most relevant:

- Education;
- Health;
- Entrepreneurship;
- Participation in policy debate and decision making (governance).

C. Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

34. The inaugural meeting of IGF, which took place in Athens from 30 October to 2 November 2006, discussed four major themes: openness, diversity, access, and security with the cross-cutting objective of development and capacity-building.

35. Ambassador Kārklīnš noted some of the challenges faced by the CSTD in the WSIS follow-up:

- Not reopening and/or rediscussing WSIS decisions, but concentrating on analysis of obstacles to implementation;
- Exploring possible new avenues for attaining connectivity goals, taking into account possible technological innovations;
- Ensuring meaningful multi-stakeholder participation in its discussions, and engaging with civil society and private sector entities not accredited to ECOSOC.

36. A number of participants pointed out that follow-up to WSIS should not be limited to the 11 Action Lines, but also include issues related to financial mechanisms and Internet governance, which were essential elements in the building of a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society. Participants stressed the need for those parallel processes such as UNGIS, IGF and GAID to collaborate closely with the CSTD and to keep it informed about their activities.

Multi-stakeholder approach

37. Panellists reiterated that building a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society was not dependent solely on Governments; it required cooperation and partnership among all stakeholders.

38. Ms. Renate Bloem, President of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with the United Nations, underscored the importance of the quantitative participation of civil society. She noted that of the WSIS-accredited civil society entities, only some 20 per cent were accredited by ECOSOC. Many of those participants, particularly those from developing countries, were involved for the first time in an international process. However, their ICT expertise and experience would benefit the CSTD in addressing the future of the information society.

39. In that context, she raised two issues with regard to ensuring that the relevant actors participated constructively and meaningfully in the follow-up to the WSIS.

40. First, the formal involvement of such actors should be guaranteed without delay in accordance with the relevant ECOSOC resolution, which stipulates that NGOs "which have received accreditation to WSIS, may participate, upon approval by ECOSOC in a timely manner, on an exceptional basis and without prejudice to the established rules of the United Nations, in the next two meetings of the Commission". She called on ECOSOC to approve the list of WSIS-accredited civil society entities, and urged ECOSOC member States to implement that decision, so as to allow the UNCTAD secretariat to make arrangements for the forthcoming 10th session of the CSTD and the civil society entities to better prepare their substantial participation in the

WSIS follow-up in a constructive manner and well in advance. She encouraged the establishment of a trust fund for NGOs from developing countries.

41. Second, she said that the follow-up to WSIS should fully engage all actors concerned, including States, international organizations, civil society and the private sector. Without such engagement, the follow-up would miss crucial dimensions and areas of expertise. It was the role of the UNCTAD secretariat, in collaboration with coalitions of stakeholders, to mobilize, and to raise awareness and interest in the CSTD — as the main follow-up mechanism in the UN system — with a view to ensuring the meaningful participation and contribution of all relevant actors.

Qualitative participation of civil society

42. The participation of NGOs and other WSIS-accredited civil society entities will be based on the basic modalities set out in ECOSOC resolution 1996/31. These include the rights to take the floor, to submit written contributions, and to propose items for the provisional agenda of Commissions. In that connection, the NGO representative called on the CSTD, while maintaining its intergovernmental nature, to develop working modalities that would facilitate multi-stakeholder exchange of views and maximize interaction between the various categories of actors engaged in the follow-up process.

43. She proposed a number of concrete measures to strengthen the multi-stakeholder nature of the work of the CSTD. They included fully involving NGOs and other stakeholders in all official and informal meetings of the CSTD, including in the processes leading to the identification of substantive themes to be addressed by the Commission. Practical arrangements could be made during the CSTD annual session for thematic and multi-stakeholder side events. Other events related to WSIS implementation and follow-up should also be clustered around the CSTD annual session, following the experience of May 2006, in a coherent and complementary manner, thus facilitating the exchange and sharing of information between those interrelated processes.

44. The CSTD intersession panels should become a space for multi-stakeholder discussion, involving experts from all categories of stakeholders, building a community of reflection, without distinction as to their various categories. Those panels could become an advisory and fully multi-stakeholder preparatory process leading to the main session of the CSTD. Multi-stakeholder contributions and initiatives, in terms of research, analysis, experience and suggestions, should emerge from and feed into the work of the CSTD.

CSTD approach to WSIS follow-up

45. Panellists observed that the substantive theme of the CSTD's 2006–2007 work programme, "promoting the building of a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society, with a view to enhancing digital opportunities for all people", was the global objective in the implementation of, and follow-up to, WSIS. It should therefore be an overarching and cross-cutting vision for all activities related to WSIS follow-up in the years ahead. The CSTD was encouraged to adopt an approach, which was consistent with the challenges rooted in the information society, account being taken of the complexities and the diversity of its needs. This approach should include the social and political dimensions, in addition to the economic and technical developments, and ensure justice and people's full participation and empowerment. Panellists emphasized that the work of the renewed CSTD

should ensure that the follow-up to WSIS was an integral part of the broader development agenda.

46. It was suggested that the CSTD and the UNCTAD secretariat consider a fund-raising effort aimed at supporting the CSTD's efforts in the follow-up to WSIS, following the model adopted for the WSIS process, where financing was based on ad hoc voluntary contributions. Such an effort should be directed towards all stakeholders.

Challenges

47. The Geneva Plan of Action has identified 11 Action Lines, and the implementation of each of them is expected to be carried out at national, regional and international levels. For each Action Line, one or a few UN agencies have been designated to facilitate the implementation activities of a broad range of diverse stakeholders.

48. Mr. Charles Geiger, Executive Director of the WSIS Executive Secretariat, identified a number of challenges faced by the CSTD in the follow-up to WSIS. The thematic areas and the Action Lines of WSIS outcome represented a "snapshot" of the key issues in 2003. With the fast pace of technological advance, new issues would need to be addressed. There was no follow-up mechanism on the theme of financial mechanisms. WSIS implementation was decentralized, with national, regional and international levels. At the international level, mechanisms for reporting on the progress made in the implementation of the Action Lines were not clearly specified. Additionally, different Action Line facilitators might have different approaches to the same themes. Lastly, UNGIS meets only once a year, and has a rotating secretariat. Moreover, it reports only to the CEB, and only on the activities of the relevant agencies, rather than on multi-stakeholder implementation. He argued that it was essential for the CSTD secretariat to have access to the necessary information from UN entities involved in implementation, as well as from all the other stakeholders in the information society, in order to assist the CSTD in carrying out its new mandate.

49. Several participants noted that ITU had decided to continue its stocktaking database, which invited users to provide inputs on what they perceive to be related to WSIS. Similarly, UNESCO maintained an observatory on the information society. It was proposed that CSTD establish an online platform to obtain information.

50. One participant proposed that an Information Society Week be organized in parallel with the annual meeting of the CSTD. Action Line facilitation meetings could be organized by the corresponding facilitators to bring together entities and mechanisms involved in the implementation of a given theme and to evaluate progress towards implementation. The CSTD — and particularly its secretariat — could help organize such an Information Society Week. It is also important to explore how inputs from facilitation meetings would be channelled to the CSTD in order to allow it to fulfil its new mandate regarding WSIS follow-up.

51. In addition to the facilitation of an annual review process, it was proposed that the CSTD take its specific expertise to the WSIS community. The CSTD could, in addition, shed light on certain scientific and technical developments that might have been overlooked, for example on open access to scientific information⁶ and the use of satellite imaging and GIS technology for

⁶ See, for example, the Information Commons for Science Initiative, launched by CODATA and followed by UNESCO.

development activities, such as health, agriculture, land records and natural resources, including water.

52. Participants emphasized that the role of the CSTD was not to coordinate or implement, but to assess implementation and make recommendations thereon. They pointed out that the implementation of WSIS outcomes, through appropriate public policies and strategies concerning the wide array of issues raised by the Summit, might benefit from an exchange of national experiences and, whenever feasible and desirable, from a coordinated effort to identify, at the international level, issues that might contribute to streamlining national initiatives, in line with the WSIS commitments, and lead to new cooperation opportunities.

Multi-year work programme

53. ECOSOC, in its resolution E/2006/46, requested that the Commission continue working on the basis of biennial action cycles and that at its next session, in May 2007, it develop its agenda and a multi-year work programme. To that end, the UNCTAD secretariat prepared a note containing proposals for a multi-year work programme, with each year devoted to a specific theme or a cluster of themes.

54. The note stressed that those thematic clusters should be addressed in an integrated manner, taking into account the political, cultural, economic and social dimensions of the information society. It being recognized that all the issues identified in the Geneva Plan of Action and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society are important, the follow-up process should cover all those issues equally, and the selection of some issues during a given cycle does not therefore diminish the importance of the commitments made with respect to the issues to be considered during future cycles.

55. The note also proposed that the measurement of the digital divide, particularly through different indicators and indices specified in paragraph 115 of the Tunis Agenda on the Information Society, and the assessment and tracking of global progress in achieving the indicative targets for improving connectivity and access in the use of ICTs, specified in paragraph 6 of Geneva Plan of Action, should be addressed in every cycle.

56. Several participants observed that sequencing the thematic areas would not be consistent with the dynamic nature of ICT development. Given the fast pace of technological development, and the implementation process, which was multifaceted and handled by various entities at different levels, one proposal was that all thematic areas be addressed on a parallel basis. Another participant noted that there was considerable overlap between the themes; therefore, more work was needed to identify the most appropriate way of grouping them into clusters. Participants also noted that the work programme should be flexible enough to accommodate the CSTD's traditional and new mandates, as well as to adapt to new developments.

57. It was proposed that the work programme be formulated on a biennial basis, with identification of gaps and progress being dealt with first, followed by policy recommendations. It was noted that the assessment report of the CSTD should be value-added. When inputs were requested from the relevant entities and mechanisms tasked with WSIS implementation, criteria should be specified in order to avoid receiving activity reports.

58. There was general agreement that since it was not possible to extend the annual session beyond five days, it was important to have a clear focus for each session, and combine the use of

general debate, interactive panels and parallel events. Participants underscored the need to streamline the traditional agenda of the CSTD. In that context, it was proposed that the secretariat conduct consultations on new methods of work and prepare a report that would be discussed at the 10th session of the CSTD.

59. Participants welcomed the UNCTAD–UNESCO joint initiative in organizing the Panel meeting, and encouraged all relevant UN agencies to collaborate in the implementation of, and follow-up to, WSIS.

Working Group on Africa

60. The Panel heard a presentation on a proposal to set up an informal Working Group for Africa (WGA) within the Commission, with the aim of developing an audit of technology for innovation activities in Africa. The presentation was made by Ms. Robyn Glaser from the Department of Science and Technology of South Africa. A group discussion was held amongst participants from Africa. The group agreed that it would be necessary to develop terms of reference for the Working Group before a particular work focus was chosen. In view of the diverse nature of African countries with regard to their economic situation, geographical position and linguistic differences, the group decided as follows:

- (1) There was agreement that the WGA should articulate and complement other existing science and technology initiatives in Africa, and that therefore guidance should be sought from AMCOST regarding the mandate of the WGA.
- (2) Although the CSTD considered establishment of an informal Working Group for Africa, the group should assume formal status at the national level.
- (3) The South African representatives would initiate an electronic dialogue to discuss possible terms of reference for the WGA, with the expectation that they would be presented in draft form at the tenth session of the Commission in May 2007. If sufficient progress is made with the electronic dialogue, South Africa will host a workshop for African representatives before the tenth session to finalize the draft terms of reference.
- (4) The Group noted with appreciation that South Africa had offered to host the Working Group, while African member countries would be responsible for covering the cost of their participation (travel, accommodation, meals and other expenses).
- (5) The Panel requested South Africa to proceed with the coordination process, with support from the representative of the African Group in the CSTD Bureau (currently Lesotho).
- (6) The composition of the Working Group should be inclusive and open-ended. Therefore, the participation of all interested partners was welcomed — international partners, individual countries, organizations and civil society at large.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

61. Bearing in mind that the General Assembly's comprehensive review of WSIS will take place in 2015, and that ECOSOC requested that at its next session the Commission develop a multi-year work programme, the Panel took note of the issues paper presented by the secretariat, and after considering this matter requested the secretariat to undertake consultations with

relevant stakeholders and to present to the CSTD a draft programme of work that should be flexible and inclusive.

62. To enable ECOSOC, through the CSTD, to carry out its mandate of effectively overseeing system-wide follow-up of the WSIS, the CSTD must have an effective interface with all agencies and mechanisms that are tasked with implementation of WSIS outcomes and other post-WSIS activities.

63. In that regard, the Panel made a number of recommendations, which are set out below.

Multi-year work programme and methods of work

64. The Panel requests the UNCTAD secretariat to prepare, for consideration at the tenth session, a note containing proposals for a multi-year work programme for the Commission and new methods of work. This note should take into account the time frame for the comprehensive review, as well as the clustering and sequencing of thematic issues from WSIS outcome documents. The work programme should adequately address the thematic concerns of WSIS, but also be flexible enough to accommodate any future need for adjustment, in view of the fast pace of technological development. To gather inputs regarding the work programme, the secretariat will carry out informal, open-ended consultations, before February 2007, with a wide range of stakeholders. These consultations could be scheduled to be held back to back with meetings of Action Line facilitators and moderators.

65. The note should also elaborate on new methods of work for the Commission, including through interactive dialogues during its annual session, with the active participation of Action Line facilitators, and other agencies and mechanisms involved with implementation of WSIS outcomes. Additionally, the note should propose concrete ways to explore development-friendly and innovative use of electronic media, drawing upon existing online databases on best practices, partnership projects and initiatives, as well as other collaborative electronic platforms, which would allow all stakeholders to contribute to the follow-up efforts, share information, learn from the experience of others and explore opportunities for partnerships.

66. Since WSIS implementation constitutes ongoing activities over a wide area, which will be developing fast, the Commission may consider a wide range of topics to examine every year. The Panel suggests that it invite the facilitators of Action Lines, and other agencies and mechanisms involved in implementation of WSIS, as well as members of other stakeholder groups, to participate in its annual sessions.

67. The Panel also proposes that the Commission at its tenth session in May 2007 request the United Nations system entities, including the regional commissions, engaged in the implementation of the Geneva and Tunis outcomes of WSIS to collaborate closely with the Commission on Science and Technology for Development by providing it with periodic reports on the progress made in the implementation of the main themes and Action Lines of WSIS, with a view to enabling the Commission to monitor, review and appraise progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation, and to advise the Council thereon.

Annex

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