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**Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to WSIS outcomes at the regional
and international levels**

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DRAFT CSTD INTERSESSIONAL SPEECH

It's a little over fifteen years now since the first session of the World Summit on the Information Society. That's a long time in digital development.

I've been asked to say something today about the progress we're making towards the Information Society – not just an Information Society but the specific vision set out by WSIS of a 'people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information Society.' And about how we should continue to measure and assess this.

I have fifteen minutes to cover fifteen years. I'll start with the past: how far we've come. Then talk about the present: how fast we're moving. Then say something about the future: what we need to do if we're to build the kind of Information Society we'd like with the resources and technologies we have now and will have tomorrow. I'll end by suggesting three ways in which we can help focus our efforts to measure progress and move forward.

So how far have we come? A long way in some respects; not so far in others.

We should not understate what's been achieved.

Fifteen years ago, in some countries, there was just one phone for every hundred people, and most of those belonged to government and business. Today, even in the poorest countries, most households have at least one phone.

Back then, the Internet was very young. Just 15% of households had access to it, almost all of them in developed countries. Now, more than 50% of individuals are online, including more than 40% in developing countries.

Fifteen years ago we used dial-up connections to read emails; now we use broadband connections to stream movies – or at least many of us do.

It's worth comparing this with other areas of infrastructure that have been growing much more slowly. Access to electricity has grown by just 7% in fifteen years; access to clean water – a crucial target in the MDGs - from 66% to 71%, to decent sanitation from 54% to 68%.

We're rightly concerned about continued inequalities in access – digital divides between countries, between women and men, between rich and poor – and I will

come back to these. But we should recognise that access to ICTs has grown more rapidly than access to some of the other priorities in the Sustainable Development Goals.

If we ask why, I think we should acknowledge two factors.

One is the extraordinarily dynamic rate of innovation in technology which has made digital services more effective, more capable, cheaper and therefore more attractive and more accessible to users year by year.

When CSTD reviewed the implementation of WSIS outcomes after ten years, in 2014, it identified many innovations that had transformed the Information Society but which were barely anticipated at the time of WSIS – among them mobile broadband, social media and cloud computing.

This has been a technology-led revolution. But it's also been facilitated by policy, legal and regulatory frameworks that have, by and large, encouraged investment and innovation – not least by recognising the complex needs of standardisation, competition policy and access.

Multistakeholder involvement in decision-making, and partnerships between government, business and communities, have helped to build a better understanding of what is happening and involved more diverse expertise in policy and programmes than might otherwise have been the case.

If we look back to the past, then, there are reasons to be cheerful. But is the Information Society that has evolved over fifteen years as 'people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented' as participants in WSIS hoped?

Last year, CSTD prepared the first in a new series of analytical commentaries on implementation of the WSIS vision. That identified three ways in which the Information Society is contributing to sustainable development:

- through specific applications and strategies for developmental sectors such as health and education, many designed by governments, international agencies and NGOs;
- through the adoption by citizens themselves of more effective, efficient and inclusive ways of doing things, such as online banking and mobile money;
- and, more subtly, through changes which ICTs are making at a societal level in the ways in which people relate to one another, to government, to business;

the places where they live and work; the ways they shop and travel, and so on.

Many of the WSIS Action Lines are concerned with the first of these, with ICT initiatives in sectors such as health and education, commerce and agriculture. Many initiatives like this have contributed significantly to the ability of governments to govern, businesses to offer goods and services, and citizens to prosper. There were some interesting and powerful examples of these, focused on specific requirements, in presentations yesterday.

We've also learnt from experience, though, that the relationship between ICTs and development is complex and often unpredictable. As well as successful initiatives, there've been many failures where projects have been poorly designed or failed to meet the needs of citizens. Impacts have varied from place to place and community to community because of their specific contexts. There have been downsides as well as upsides to digitalisation, losers as well as winners.

It's become increasingly clear that we need to take a more holistic view of what is happening when we assess the implementation of WSIS outcomes – and to recognise, in particular, that digital does not necessarily mean better, especially if it's disconnected from other aspects of human development.

Last year, CSTD identified some challenges of the Information Society that can act as framing issues for assessing progress. I'll refer to three of these and make two points on each.

The first concerns access, inclusiveness and inequality.

As I've said, the growth in access to communications has been greater than that in other utilities and services recently, but access is still incomplete and unequal, within and between countries.

Evidence from both ITU and GSMA also suggests that the rate of growth of access is slowing, which means that we will not achieve the SDG target of universal participation in LDCs by 2020. The gender digital divide does not seem to be getting smaller, either.

The reason for this slowdown may be twofold: market saturation in developed and some developing countries, which is to be expected; but also, more problematic, the difficulty everywhere of reaching the least connected, poorest, most marginalised, least literate, with services they can afford, and have the skills to use.

Addressing the digital divide in basic connectivity today, I'd suggest, is no longer primarily an ICT challenge but part of a more widespread challenge of poverty, inequality and marginalisation, which has to be addressed by broad development strategies as much as strategies concerned with ICTs.

My second point on access is that its meaning has changed and become more complex. Access with smartphones is different to access with feature phones. Access with high-capacity reliable broadband is different from access with low-capacity unreliable networks.

The digital divides we need to measure and address today – within and between countries – are as much to do with the quality and diversity of digital participation as with its quantity.

Access targets must change over time, along with the capacity of bandwidth, hardware and software. We should pay much more attention to the skills and capabilities required to use technology. We need to measure these things in terms of future needs as well as in relation to the present and the past.

The second framing issue concerns trust and security.

“Digital solutions are transforming lives and can turbocharge our work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” the UN Secretary-General said last year. ‘But alongside the tremendous benefits that it can bring, new issues have emerged around cybersecurity, data and artificial intelligence.’

Cybersecurity has become a primary concern for governments, businesses and citizens – and international organisations, not just those concerned with ICTs or development but also those concerned with peace and security.

Realising the potential of any technology depends to a large extent on how well it is trusted to deliver what we want and protect us from what we don't. ICTs are highly capable of delivering beneficial services more efficiently and more effectively than analogue alternatives, but just as capable of delivering harmful activities more efficiently and more effectively.

They are vulnerable, too, to system failures arising from technology itself or deliberate attack by third parties. That vulnerability affects everything from the integrity of communications networks, to individual privacy, the viability of national utilities, and national security. It's a product of ICTs' success, which becomes more important as ICTs become more important to our economies, societies and governance.

Many of the impacts that ICTs have had since WSIS have been unexpected; and this too will continue. Sometimes unexpected outcomes have been more than welcome; sometimes not. Usually, their impact's mixed.

Social media, for example, have hugely increased people's capacity to interact with one another – but also contributed to political polarisation and been abused for propaganda, harassment and in some cases to sponsor violence and hatred. As well as bringing benefits, as the Secretary-General said at the IGF, 'We see the Internet being used as a platform for hate speech, for repression, censorship, and control.'

If people are to use the Internet and other ICTs effectively, they need to believe that they will help not harm them; that they will be empowered by them, not harassed or defrauded; that their privacy will be respected and protected. Trust, security and confidence are important factors in enabling progress towards 'a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society,' and measuring them is part of measuring that progress.

We also need – this is my third framing issue – to look beyond the digital sector alone to the impact of digitalisation on society as a whole.

The Secretary-General's annual reports on WSIS and the contributions made to this meeting give many examples of ways in which ICTs have had beneficial impacts on different SDGs. As further new technologies emerge, we envisage many more potential benefits. More reasons to be cheerful.

But the relationship between digital innovations and their impacts is complex and affects different groups of people in different ways.

Those with higher incomes and higher levels of educational attainment are usually able to take greater advantage of ICTs than others – which has undermined hopes that ICTs would inherently reduce the inequalities within societies.

Most aspects of the emerging Information Society have opportunities and risks, winners and losers. The *2030 Agenda's* requirement that we leave no-one behind requires us to measure and address the interests and the needs of both. I'll take three examples.

- ICTs have created new opportunities for employment, for example through outsourcing, but also threaten established areas of employment and employment rights as more jobs become susceptible to automation.

- Content platforms have made it easier and cheaper for musicians and writers to publish, but also easier for customers to use their content without paying. And they have given substantial market power to a small number of new content platforms.
- E-commerce enables new business opportunities and increases access to goods and services for many people, but it also affects the viability of traditional service sectors and the jobs, high streets, marketplaces and communities that depend on them.

The development of an Information Society, in other words, has been more complicated than many thought it would be at the time of WSIS.

We have seen substantial gains arising from digitalisation and we should expect these to continue and to grow, but there are also downsides and vulnerabilities to take into account in our assessment. We need to measure and to understand the whole picture if we're to maximise new opportunities and minimise potential future risks.

One major challenge here is measurement. The Information Society may be built on data, but the data that we use to measure it are poor. In many countries, even the access and usage data that are published are out-of-date or estimates. Data on the impact of ICTs are even weaker.

We need to improve the quality of data-gathering and analysis if we are to improve our measurement of WSIS outcomes. Not just to gather more data, but to gather more disaggregated data, to look more critically at the data sets we have, and to relate them more to evidence from other developmental data sets.

I've spent much of the last year helping UNESCO to develop its Internet Universality indicators, which it adopted recently as a framework for assessing national Internet environments. These cover multiple dimensions of the Information Society – not just access but also rights, openness and governance, gender, sustainable development and the security, legal and ethical frameworks surrounding the Internet. They bring together quantitative and qualitative indicators to allow a more holistic view of progress to be made at national level. We need that diversity of sources and evidence to understand progress towards the Information Society.

In my last few minutes, I want to look towards the future, the time in which WSIS participants hoped their vision of the Information Society would be realised.

The last fifteen years have taught us how hard it is to anticipate the evolution of ICTs. Many of the things we now consider fundamental to the Information Society were not present at the time of WSIS.

When we look at the next wave of innovation, it's hard to predict beyond the relatively short term. We should accept that many of the assumptions we make today are likely to prove wrong. I think, though, that we can say two things.

First, the development of ICTs will continue to accelerate. Following yesterday's discussion here, I'll offer my definition of rapid technological change which is: 'technological change that is likely to lead to significant and irreversible impacts *before* it is possible to undertake effective evaluation of those impacts or develop and agree effective policy or governance frameworks that respond to them.'

This pace of change makes it more difficult for us to develop strategies to harness technology or address unexpected outcomes, and harder to do what the *Geneva Declaration of Principles* sought, to shape the Information Society rather than allowing technology to shape it for us; to shape it so that it becomes 'people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented.'

Second, the central issue now is not about what ICTs can add to our societies but what ICTs are doing to them.

It concerns the *overall* digitalisation of economy, society and culture and a wide range of digital technologies – automation and robotics, machine learning and artificial intelligence, new modalities for computing, data management and manipulation, algorithmic decision-making, et cetera. Whatever we call this – my own preference is the Digital Society – it reaches far beyond the Internet or the kind of communications technologies that concerned WSIS participants.

So what does this imply for how we assess progress in the future?

I'd say we'll need to consider the Information Society's development much more clearly within the context of broader economic, social and cultural development.

A 'people-centred' Information Society will not be one in which digitalisation is maximised, but one in which digitalisation interfaces with to other aspects of the sustainable development agenda – with economic and social welfare, environmental sustainability and efforts to secure a more stable international order.

This implies that we need to reflect more than we have done on the kind of Information Society that we want. I've suggested elsewhere three questions that we should ask if we want to shape the development of the Information Society.

- First, what do we want to change?
- Second, what do we want to preserve?
- And third, what do we want to prevent?

To some extent the SDGs provide a frame of reference for this.

I'll end with three practical suggestions about how we can move forward in assessing progress towards the WSIS vision fifteen years after the Summit.

The first is to shift our focus from past to future. It's useful to measure how far we have come since 2005, but most of what is central to the Information Society today was not then part of it. If we want to maximise our chance of shaping future trends, we need to concentrate on what is happening today and what is likely to happen in the future.

The second is to stress the value of dialogue and cooperation. To understand the present and the future, we need to draw on all the sources of expertise and opportunities for dialogue we have. It's a project that, if I can build on what the Secretary-General said at the IGF, should be

multifactorial, multilateral, multistakeholder, multisectoral and multidisciplinary.

My last point concerns CSTD itself, which was given the responsibility of monitoring progress in implementing WSIS outcomes, has produced extensive five and ten year reviews of developments since WSIS, and provides this annual opportunity to review how things are going.

Your dual mandate means, I think, as Shamika Sirimanne said yesterday, that you are well-placed to build on two critical interfaces for the Information Society – that with science, technology and innovation generally; and that with sustainable economic and social development as set out in the SDGs and the *2030 Agenda*. You can draw on widespread expertise in doing so, as you have done this week, and I hope that will build on this in future to continue the leading role you've played in assessing progress towards implementing the WSIS vision.