

**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)**

**Contribution to the CSTD ten-year review of the implementation of WSIS
outcomes**

Submitted by

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UNDESA's Inputs to the Commission's 10 Year Review in the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

1. To what extent, in your experience, has the “people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society”, envisaged in the opening paragraph of the WSIS Geneva Declaration of Principles, developed in the ten years since WSIS?

For the e-government part of this WSIS vision, we have observed and tracked significant transformation during the ten year period. The data revolution and generation of large datasets, particularly in the last 5 years, opened new avenues for governments to share information and to co-create services in collaboration with civil society. These, coupled with advances in broadband and mobile technology has seen the promotion and use of a broad array of innovative Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) applications, from almost all geographic regions of the world, to address pressing needs in health, e-learning, human security, and business development as showcased in the Compendium of ICT Applications on E-Government, published by UNDESA.

A combination of these new ICTs and traditional public administration concepts, have enabled governments to deliver online services and reach out to citizens on a previously unmatched scale. While all 193 countries have now government websites for the first time in 2014 – progress in terms of connecting government departments and equipping them with a web presence at central government level has been remarkable; meeting the target 6.

During the last decade, two initiatives of DESA, namely the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament (global initiative) and the Africa i-Parliament Action Plan (an Africa-wide initiative), have played a unique and critical role in building the ICT capacity of parliaments and contributing towards the implementation of WSIS action line C1, particularly focusing on the needs of small and developing democracies. These Projects played a considerable role in empowering legislatures to better fulfil their constitutional functions through the use of ICT.

These trends show that in the past ten years, there has been a steady global progress on e-Government development towards people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, although progress has not been evenly distributed. South Asia and most sub-regions in Africa, for instance, show negative growth. Overall, global E-Government Development Index (EGDI) shows progress from a world average of 0.3645 in 2013 to 0.4712 in 2014, which suggests that the global provision of e-Government services increased on average by 29.3 % in all Regions¹.

¹ indicators for 2014 were collected in mid-2013 and may reflect data from 2013 or earlier

2. How far do you consider the implementation of specific WSIS outcomes to have been achieved?

If the action lines being coordinated by DESA are a reliable indication, the implementation of WSIS outcomes has made satisfactory progress. We present some of DESA's observations on the section lines that we coordinate.

Action Line C1. The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development.

The inter-connectivity of ICTs have provided enhanced cooperation among stakeholders and vastly improved communication leading to advanced decision making and service delivery in general. As a result, governments have managed to provide more efficient and effective services at lower costs, while simultaneously sharing information with citizens, thereby effectively enhancing citizen engagement in decisions about policies and service delivery options.

Action Line C7: ICT Applications – E-government.

E-government is recognized by governments and stakeholders as an enabler of good governance. Since 2006, DESA has been publishing the Compendium of Innovative E-government Practices. This publication contains a compilation of case studies of innovative e-government solutions, services and applications with elements of transferability and adaptability.

The United Nations E-government Surveys focus on e-government utilization for sustainable development, especially in the post-2015 era. Previous surveys have focussed on: people-centred e-government (2012), leveraging e-government at a time of financial and economic crisis (2010), changing e-government from e-government to connected governance (2008), From E-Government to E-Inclusion (2005), Towards Access for Opportunity (2004), and E-government at the Crossroads (2003).

Action Line C11: International and Regional cooperation.

Various international organisations including UNDESA, ITU, UNESCO, UNCTAD, WIPO, UN regional commissions and other United Nations entities have continued to work towards fostering international and regional cooperation and work with intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies through holding events, conferences, meetings and joint programmes.

The Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, a direct response to a request made by the WSIS to produce official statistics to monitor the information society, is an example of successful inter-agency collaboration that has allowed partners to combine human and financial resources to avoid duplication while maximizing outreach.

Furthermore, to achieve international and regional cooperation in Internet governance, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) has provided a unique multi-stakeholder platform for the discussion of public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.

The WSIS Stocktaking is another important initiative undertaken to strengthen international and regional cooperation. It is intended to fulfil the dual purpose of providing an inventory of activities undertaken by governments and all stakeholders in implementing the Geneva decisions (WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action) and taking stock of the progress made in building the Information Society

In addition, UNDESA is developing a Measurement and Evaluation Tool for Engagement and e-Participation (METEP), a new interactive tool that aims to help the Member States better understand the state of play in using ICTs for civic engagement and public participation. METEP considers three major building blocks of citizen engagement – (a) provision of information to citizens, (b) consulting citizens on development matter, and (c) engaging them for decision-making. The outcome of such evaluation can be an important source of policy and practice recommendations aimed at engaging citizens more directly in key areas of development planning and public management.

For capacity development in the past five years, DESA has organized over dozens of regional workshops in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America that provided a forum for countries to exchange ideas, learn from each other and form e-government networks among themselves. In addition, over 50 advisory and technical assistance missions have been initiated and have taken place to support governments in implementing their respective e-strategies that dealt with e-content, citizen-engagement, online services, e-participation, infrastructure development, e-government policies and guidelines, thus, bridging the digital divide and institutional frameworks.

3. How has the implementation of WSIS outcomes contributed towards the development of a “people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society”?

Countries that have embraced e-government have experienced its transformative power – in revitalizing public administration for a more citizen-centred approach, overhauling public management, fostering inclusive leadership and moving civil service towards higher efficiency, transparency and accountability.

However, a citizen- centred administration is only as inclusive as it is used by citizens. Concerning usage, in the developing world there is no comprehensive data on actual e-government usage on a global scale. But some available country data shows that developing countries’ uptake rate greatly varies. For example, 50 per cent of Colombian citizens

interacted with the government through electronic channels in 2012. In comparison, only 11.3% of Egyptian households are aware of the existence of e-government services.

The Internet Government Forum (IGF), another outcome of WSIS, has also contributed to fostering a common understanding of the potential of the Internet for sustainable development. In all of its various working activities since its creation in 2006, the IGF has endeavoured to fulfil its mandate by providing an open and inclusive multi-stakeholder platform to address policy issues related to the Internet. The 9th annual meeting of the IGF will take place in Istanbul, Turkey from 2-5 September 2014. Brazil has already offered to host the 10th IGF in 2015. The IGF today has firmly established itself as the essential place where the vast Internet governance community gathers to share experiences and exchange information.

The IGF has implemented a continuous improvement process with a review of ‘what worked well and what did not’ in the open consultations after each Annual IGF meeting. The IGF has created a sense of community that allows discussions of challenging issues in an open and frank manner. Part of the value of the multi-stakeholder approach is both agreeing and disagreeing on various issues and encouraging participants to show respect and listen to each other’s arguments, positions and needs, and the IGF provides this unique space.

4. What are the challenges to the implementation of WSIS outcomes? What are the challenges that have inhibited the emergence of a “people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society”?

The challenges that have inhibited the emergence of a “people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society” are:

- Allocating adequate resources for ICT projects.
- Competencies of the personnel involved in the delivery of the projects. Strong project management and coordination skills as well as technical knowledge are required.
- Access and affordability issues by the citizens. Many citizens worldwide still cannot afford to access e-services. ICT services continue to be more affordable in high income economies and less affordable in low income economies.
- Existence of digital divide. Many disadvantaged groups still do not have access to the ICTs.
- Challenges have arisen in ensuring basic human rights and freedom of expression in the online world.
- Cyber threats that diminish trust in e-government and e-commerce.

For instance, e-government is a multidimensional and complex issue, which requires broad definition and understanding in order to be able to design and implement successful visions

and strategies. The adoptive challenge of e-government go far beyond technology, they call for organizational structures that would respond to a whole government approach along with new forms of leadership, transformative public and private partnerships, participatory processes and increased accountability.

Even with technological progress, human capital remains a major shortcoming in both middle- and low-income countries. Few civil services are able to compete with private sector salaries with the inevitable result that top information technology personnel in developing countries tend to gravitate towards commercial firms. Even in cases where governments are able to recruit highly skilled information technology workers, these young men and women tend to stay only long enough to acquire enough experience to make them marketable in the private sector then quickly leave their government jobs for more lucrative employment.

Another key challenge is inter-operability. However, quite often inter-operability is misunderstood merely as a technological challenge. In addition to technological inter-operability there are two key challenges: institutional inter-operability and semantic inter-operability. The latter denotes the fact that, quite often, different government agencies speak different “languages”, making it difficult or more challenging to facilitate service delivery and improve efficiency. Capacity development responses must address these three levels of inter-operability simultaneously.

While on the one hand the promulgation of ICT tools and technologies positively impacts the transparency, accessibility and accountability in the work of legislatures, on the other hand it has a potential to increase disparity between various national assemblies in terms of access to data, parliamentary networks, new advanced technologies, education, etc.

5. How are these challenges being addressed? What approaches have proved to be effective in your experience?

The following approaches were taken in regard to existing challenges:

- Encourage greater regional and international dialogue and collaboration in promoting ICTs for development.
- Foster greater multistakeholder engagement and cooperation at the local, national, regional and international levels among all stakeholders through capacity building, research and knowledge sharing for development of the ICT sector.
- Promote the availability of affordable access to ICT as a key to the success of all stakeholders’ efforts to establish an information society and bridge existing and emerging inequalities in the digital economy.
- Ensure that the services resulting from policies and frameworks can be accessed by citizens in the community through affordable and public access to ICTs and training and encourage a feedback process as well as a monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

- Promote inclusive e-government through e-participation and increase availability of government data for reuse in order to promote participation in public policy-decision-making, responsiveness, transparency and accountability.

The 2005 Survey entitled ‘Global E-Government Readiness Report 2005: From E-Government to E-Inclusion’ underlines the fact that the majority of the developing country populations face a grave challenge from new technological revolution. Whereas some of the developing countries which have in place the right mix of reforms, institutions and programmes will no doubt benefit from the ICTs, most are likely to be mired in a cycle of low income, poverty and a growing disparity in access to modern technology. Expanding the concept of real access into e-inclusion, the Survey presents the Socially Inclusive Governance Framework, which is a multi-prolonged approach to ICT-led real access, with a special focus on the need to promote access and inclusion to the disadvantaged groups in the society.

The Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, a direct response to a request made by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to produce official statistics to monitor the information society, is an example of successful inter-agency collaboration that has allowed partners to combine human and financial resources to avoid duplication while maximizing outreach.

One of the tools used ‘METER’ is an online, interactive tool to assist governments and decision makers to develop, monitor, refine and improve the context within which information and communication technologies are used to transform government. It is essential that a government takes stock of and assesses its national enabling environment before embarking on the preparation, improvement and realization of an e-government strategy and development plan before deciding to invest in new e-government programmes so as to ensure the success of these initiatives. In addition it is critical to correctly identify the conditions that make the use of ICT an enabler in the process of parliamentary modernization. The IGF has been a key platform where many of the challenges in implementing the WSIS outcomes have been addressed over the past 9 years. In all of its various working activities since its creation in 2006, the IGF has endeavoured to fulfil its mandate by providing an open and inclusive multi-stakeholder platform to address policy issues related to the Internet.

A comprehensive capacity building track is now part of the annual IGF programming, for those participants who wanted to participate in sessions geared towards capacity building specifically helping make the IGF a ‘one-stop-shop’ on Internet governance issues. Increasing and enhancing International and regional cooperation on Internet Governance is also a primary goal of the IGF community. The increasing number of bottom-up, multi-stakeholder National and Regional IGF initiatives lead the IGF’s efforts to promote international and regional dialogue on Internet governance related public policy issues. More than 30 National and Regional IGFs now exist and are fully functioning multistakeholder initiatives.

6. What do you consider the most important trends in technology and other aspects of ICTs which have affected implementation of WSIS outcomes since the Summit? What has been their impact?

In the area of e-government, according to the UN E-Government Survey 2014, the main global trends on e-government development are e-participation, open government, multichannel service delivery, digital divide and attention to vulnerable groups, expanding usage and whole-of-government. There is objective evidence showing that they are moving governments towards more efficient, participatory, responsive and accountable institutions. It is important to highlight the roles of institutional coordination and capacity building to address these goals.

The United Nations E-Government Survey 2008: From E-Government to Connected Governance posits that ICTs can help reinvent government in such a way that the existing institutional arrangements can be restructured and new innovative arrangements can flourish, paving the way for a transformed government.

The evidence indicates that success or failure is less a technological issue and more a people issue – in particular, the ability to change public service cultures and motivate public sector workers to new ways of working, address trade union concerns, and provide adequately skilled and competent management and leadership. Improving user take-up as an integrated part of improving public sector service delivery – and specifically user take-up among citizens – is a high political priority.

For many years, the focus on technology has overshadowed the need for organizational, structural, and cultural changes in the public sector. Key challenges (e.g. legal and cultural barriers for collaboration and co-operation within and across levels of government – the prerequisites for building attractive, integrated, user-focused e-government services) have hence been left unaddressed. In the process of rendering internal government functions and processes more efficient and effective, users were often forgotten.

Several innovations have emerged in the journey to inclusive Information Society, such as broadband, social networks, mobility, digital inclusion, massive open online courses and e-participation, amongst others. Many of these innovations bring diffusion and uptake of mobile technologies, as well as, improved access to ICTs, which has led to the great expansion of the gamut of opportunities that ICTs offer to promote inclusive and sustainable development.

7. What should be the priorities for stakeholders seeking to achieve WSIS outcomes and progress towards the Information Society, taking into account emerging trends?

One of the priorities to progress towards the Information Society is connected with the provision and effective dissemination of evidence on how ICT contributes to various aspects of sustainable development, including governance and public administration. In this regard, the implementation of many initiatives that are being implemented by DESA, such as UNPSA, the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, the Africa i- Parliament Action Plan, and others proved to be very successful in promoting and facilitating the adaptation and implementation of successful innovative practices that are based on the utilization of ICT tools and modern methodologies.

For e-government it is clear that the focus in public service delivery should be on user needs, demands, and satisfaction – not on the tools and service delivery channels governments have been focusing on since the mid-1990s.

Governments are shifting from a government-centric paradigm to a citizen-centric paradigm, putting more attention on the context (e.g. social, organisational, and institutional factors) in which e-government is developing and on the outcomes for users. Today, e-government (understood as both ICT usage and its broad impact on public governance) has moved from being “just another office tool”, through the phase of being a tool for transformation of the public sector, to becoming a key lever for innovation and change.

Designing a responsive public institutional framework and promoting capacity building at various levels is key to achieve WSIS outcomes. However, it should be noted that one of the lessons learned from the experience is that these solutions are not always found within the realm of technology and ICTs. The enabling environment may include civil service reform, human resource management, training courses, firm political decisions establishing clarity about workflows and decision-making processes, bureaucratic simplification, process re-engineering and other policy tools that go well beyond ICTs.

In addition, the realization of WSIS outcomes should be performed with necessary protection and respect for human rights. It is necessary to address e-environment issues and challenges, develop Green IT and use ICTs to mitigate climate change.

8. What role should information and communications play in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda?

Use of information and communication in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda should help to:

- Protect and reinforce all human rights, recognize their importance to realize economic and social development, ensuring equal respect for and enforcement of all human rights online and offline;
- Encourage and facilitate people-centered and inclusive governance models and mechanisms;
- Strengthen open, democratic, transparent and inclusive WSIS multistakeholder approach, enabling all stakeholders to participate according to their respective roles and responsibilities, in the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action;
- Promote the development and availability of simplified devices, including text-free interfaces and applications aimed at digital inclusion;
- Mainstream gender issues across all WSIS action lines;
- Bridge the digital divide by promoting inclusiveness and by facilitating countries' economic growth;
- Work towards a more culturally and linguistically diverse world;
- Ensure the preservation of digital heritage in the information society by putting into place cohesive, conceptual and practical digital strategies;
- Promote a digital economy, ensuring equal opportunities for all in creating and providing online services;
- Enhance national and regional capacity to address cybersecurity challenges by encouraging a culture of responsibility and joint efforts of all involved parties according to their roles to address security risks;
- Promote a culture of online security and safety, empowering users, and encouraging national, regional and international cybersecurity strategies to protect users, including children.

The world in the post-2015 era will not be very different from the world today, but with increasing social contrasts in some regions, it would be a big mistake to put all eggs only in high-technology baskets. E-Government can encompass not only technology and data, but also policy implementation as a result of responsive public administration frameworks. In the future, there may be no difference between e-government and government. To translate e-government into socio-economic impact, it will always be important to balance capacity building, technology and back-office coordination.

The post-2015 development agenda consists of daunting challenges, that developed and developing countries face in achieving their progress towards providing better public services to their citizens, building a more sustainable future for their constituencies by leveraging the ICT in an innovative way. It should be focused on the role of e-government institutions to (i) enable their focus on development, especially the outcomes of the post-2015 development agenda; (ii) increase responsibilities for promoting and managing private-public partnerships; (iii) broaden their capacities to respond to an ever changing and challenging world of technological innovation; (iv) prepare structures and functions that would respond to growing decentralization; and (v) ensure the needed financing in a world undergoing a global financial crisis.

9. Please add any other comments that you wish to make on the subject of the review that you believe would be helpful.

An Information Society is not necessarily a high-technology society. Because governments play a central role in steering a society in a desired direction, a government needs to be willing to promote participation to be responsive. In order to provide a single window or a one-stop shop, a government needs to establish a strategic optimization of its public service. Rushing towards digital technology without solving the main challenges in an “analogue” manner quite often leads to duplication of efforts and waste of resources. Experience shows that one of the main lessons learned is that an information society requires considerable public administration improvements before embarking on the myth that technology and data-based solutions solve everything. It is important to have information serving society and not the other way round.