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

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

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7. 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?

Over the last 10 years, the vision envisaged by the Geneva declaration has not experienced a homogenous and uniform development across countries and continents. The digital divide is less pronounced due to investment in infrastructure and new technologies; however the poor and marginalised groups (including women) are still underserved. Internet Governance has at times turned into the venue for pushing for more governmental and inter-governmental control, clearly going against the WSIS principles.

We are witnessing the creation of a new divide that can have important negative repercussions over the functioning and integrity of the Internet, with an indirect impact on all the other areas, from economic development freedom of expression and the protection of human rights including freedom of expression.

The EU and its Member States have assumed a leading role in promoting inclusiveness and continued to be a strong defender of the multistakeholder system. In the recent EC communication on Internet Governance the European Commission laid out its strategy for maintaining a free, open and unfragmented Internet.

While the international community has shown unprecedented capacity to reach a rough consensus in the recent Netmundial conference great challenges remain.

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

WSIS was and still is an important process that generated many effects. At the same time, when evaluating the outcomes we have to take into consideration that many of the advances are the result of factors such as market forces, other international organisations and national or regional policies.

Many positive steps have been taken in action lines such as infrastructure, access, capacity building or building confidence. The international connectivity of developing countries has increased with de deployment of submarine cables, the penetration of the Internet has reached 3 billion persons, capacity building is an integral part of project developed by international organisations and national governments. As well cyber-security is addressed by national CERT`s and know-how exchanges between countries. WSIS had played a major role in creating awareness at a world-wide scale.

The European Union is one of the world biggest development donors with investments in deployment of infrastructure including an almost global and interconnected research high speed network, capacity building and know-how exchanges on almost all the big topics (infrastructure, cyber-security, e-skills and e-services), development of cross-cutting e-applications for energy, agriculture, education and many others.

The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development is still debated in many organisations. Some setbacks have been registered, the most recent being the UN General Assembly resolution on WSIS modalities that does not empower active and real input from stakeholders other than governments.

The Internet Governance Forum, as a by-product of WSIS had reached its maturity and it is ready to be taken to a new level. The extension of the mandate is necessary together with assuring the necessary tools to meet the goals (e.g. stable secretariat).

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

See answer in question 7.

Even if we are not at the end of the road and we are witnessing setbacks, the major impact of the WSIS process is creating awareness and pushing governments and other stakeholders in developing strategies and putting Information Society higher in national agendas.

10. 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"?

As mention in the answers to the questions above we see that one major challenge is created by the lack of common understanding on how the central resources of the internet should be managed and the increased pressure for more governmental and inter-governmental control over the Internet. The ideas that UN organisations are the right place to deal with Internet governance goes against the inclusiveness principles and how the Internet works. The results of bridging initiatives such as NetMundial have to be recognised and put in practice.

Respective to the other action lines we see challenges in uncompetitive environments in many countries generating high prices and low investments; capacity building has to be increased specifically on cyber-security to cope with the constant increase in cybercrime, e-skills and local content are not tacked enough at national level.

While ICT's are a new medium for information sharing and communication it does not change international law in areas that are technologically neutral, such as human rights. Same rights that people have offline must also be respected and promoted online. One of the challenges of the information society is to ascertain that the digital era does not open up for alternative interpretations of the fundamental values that our societies are built upon, including principles of democracy and the rule of law. A free and independent media is vital in the promotion of these values.

The EU welcomes ongoing work within UNESCO on internet-related issues, more specifically focusing on in areas such as access, freedom of expression, privacy and ethics. The EU has reaffirmed its attachment to freedom of expression in recently published EU guidelines.

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

First of all, WSIS has to become a process that is more about development and less about Internet Governance. The main policy responsibilities remain with national governments and ultimately they are responsible for ensuring that ICT becomes a cross cutting activity in all sectors together with creating the right legal and regulatory environment to enable development and reinforces existing human rights law.

Our work should be guided by the multistakehoder principles both nationally and internationally. More recognition has to be given to organisation that are not in the UN system but are net contributors and decision makers. Using the current organisation to develop a common understanding about how the internet should work with the input off all those concerns.

The EU for example, though one of the most connected regions in the world also has to face an internal digital divide: between EU member states in the north and in the south, urban and rural areas, between the digitally literate and those who lack the necessary skills to benefit from the Internet and, last but not least, the gap between those who can afford to connect and those who cannot.

To tackle these problems it is using a wide range of policies, together with our Member States. Building networks is not enough; we also need to focus our policies on issues like affordability of services, cultural barriers and digital illiteracy.

EU policy aims at stimulating stronger competition on the market that will lead to lower prices by using a wide range of regulatory measures imposed by independent national regulators. It also intervenes with public funding to build the necessary infrastructure, wherever the market alone is not able to do it. Alternatively it uses satellite connections in remote areas. Satellite broadband is extremely cost effective, with monthly subscriptions comparable with (and often better than) equivalent performance ADSL offers.

Digital literacy is high on the priority list of the European Social Fund programmes. The European Commission has developed so-called "Grand Coalitions" at European and national level composed of a number of relevant stakeholders, such as ICT and non-ICT companies, education and training providers, education and employment ministries, public and private employment services, associations, NGOs, and social partners. These coalitions aim at providing training, certifying skills, improving school and university curricula, and raising awareness about ICT careers, especially among young people and women.

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

Mobile technology has had the greatest impact on the access to ICT tools and is responsible for the boost in Internet penetration all around the world.

Social Media, with its normative implications, has created platforms for freedom of expression and is still a big emerging trend. However, censorship has accompanied such trends as a response to the huge inflow of information, different from classical information tools. And in addition, online censorship has implication on the technical functioning of the Internet.

This issue of jurisdiction is emerging as more and more activities are moving online.

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

The WSIS process needs to become more inclusive in order to keep its importance and relevance. While the decision on WSIS modalities is a step back the work carried out in Geneva with the revision of the action lines shows that more inclusiveness can be achieved.

The IGF 2015 could be a preparatory meeting providing input for the WSIS review meeting in December.

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

Information and communications is an important component of the post-2015 development agenda. The Communication of the European Commission of 2 June 2014 (COM(2014) 335, *A decent Life for all: from vision to collective action*) includes, for the purpose of achieving inclusive sustainable growth, a proposed target to need for ensuring access to markets and finance, and to information and communication technologies and networks. Training on ICT is highlighted in the context of education and underlined in relation to the objective of gender equality and women's empowerment. Another important proposed target, in the context of human rights, the rule of law, good governance and effective institutions, is the need to ensure transparency and guarantee the public's right of access to information, government data, independent media and the open internet.

These proposals by the European Commission are generally coherent with the proposal of the UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as agreed on 19 July 2014. Thus, the goal on inclusive sustainable growth includes targets on technological upgrading and innovation. The report contains a proposed target to significantly increase access to ICT and strive to provide universal and affordable access to internet in LDCs. The proposed goal on education includes a target to expand the number of scholarships for developing countries in particular Least Developed Countries (LDCs), SIDS and African countries to enrol in higher education, including ICT. The proposed goal on gender equality includes a target to enhance the use of enabling technologies, in particular ICT, to promote women's empowerment. On means of implementation, the section on technology contains a target to enhance in LDCs the use of enabling technologies in particular ICT.

In addition, information and communications will play a crucial role when it comes to implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. The Commission has highlighted that targets should be measurable and build on available data, or data that is likely to become available in the

near future, based on indicators that allow monitoring progress. The collection, publication and assessment of data and information on the pace of progress are key to promoting transparency. To ensure that no-one is left behind, this should include collecting adequately disaggregated data. The Commission has indicated that strengthening the use of existing data and ensuring that more and better data are being collected, capitalising on new technologies and software, is crucial. Therefore, the development of ICT technologies will be crucial for the purpose of review and accountability. This objective is also reflected in the report of the Open Working Group on SDGs. The Commission intends to take these important elements further in developing the EU position for the intergovernmental negotiation that will lead to the adoption, in September 2015, of a post-2015 development agenda and in its implementation.

The inclusion of broadband action lines in the post-2015 agenda can have a major impact on the use of ICT as a cross-cutting development tool. ICT need to be considered when addressing other issues such as women empowerment and gender equality.