

# WSIS and beyond, a reality check



**world summit  
on the information society**  
Geneva 2003 - Tunis 2005

An interview with Charles Geiger  
on the post-WSIS process  
by  
Reza Salim

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Knowledge Society Institute (KSI)

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This interview with Charles Geiger was made by Reza Salim on 2 July 2008 in Geneva at the Palais des Nations. The footnotes were added later by Mr. Geiger to the edited text. The opinions expressed in the answers are those of the author, and do not necessarily tally with or reflect the views of the institutions with which he is or was affiliated.

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## FORWORD



Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are among if not the most important development enablers over the last 20 years. Putting ICTs on the political Agenda at WSIS and the Development Agenda of the UN was therefore a consequent acting. But it was not enough to organize the ICT4D platform at WSIS 1 in Geneva and at WSIS 2 in Tunis. Those were important launch paths for big jumps forward. Hence, the development community did not show the same buy-in like the private sector. To many got kept back assuming that those are mere technical tools competing with important development issues like food security and feeding hungry people. Those were and are the wrong questions and views! ICTs are enabler of most development work and processes speeding up access to information and using it as knowledge for development.

To many members of the development actors remained caught in their old thinking instead of living-up to innovation and becoming more entrepreneurial in their approach. Some but not enough private-public partnerships were founded and brought remarkable and lasting solutions. The use of broadband is and remains a key issue to transport volume of dates with high speed and making it less expensive. Timely access to information and knowledge will substantially contribute to better reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the post 2015 period.

May those who act too slowly be shown by good and durable results that they should board the train before it is too late. Citizens in all countries should have the right to accede to the information they want. It is about their education, their better perspectives and for their future generations.

Thank you all for your engagement, your courage and your future devotion to the cause of development and the appropriate use of ICTs. May your leadership be rewarded by serving others for a common cause and lasting results.

### **Ambassador Walter FUST**

Former Director General

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

29 April 2013

# WSIS Overview

The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases. The first phase took place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and the second phase took place in Tunis, from 16 to 18 November 2005.

## **Geneva Phase: 10-12 December 2003**

The objective of the first phase was to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and take concrete steps to establish the foundations for an Information Society for all, reflecting all the different interests at stake.

Nearly 50 Heads of state/government and Vice-Presidents, 82 Ministers, and 26 Vice-Ministers from 175 countries as well as high-level representatives from international organizations, private sector, and civil society attended the Geneva Phase of WSIS and gave political support to the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Geneva Plan of Action that were adopted on 12 December 2003. More than 11,000 participants from 175 countries attended the Summit and related events.

## **Tunis Phase: 16-18 November 2005**

The objective of the second phase was to put Geneva's Plan of Action into motion as well as to find solutions and reach agreements in the fields of Internet governance, financing mechanisms, and follow-up and implementation of the Geneva and Tunis documents.

Nearly 50 Heads of state/government and Vice-Presidents and 197 Ministers, Vice Ministers and Deputy Ministers from 174 countries as well as high-level representatives from international organizations, private sector, and civil society attended the Tunis Phase of WSIS and gave political support to the Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society that were adopted on 18 November 2005. More than 19,000 participants from 174 countries attended the Summit and related events.

## WSIS and beyond, a reality check

An interview<sup>1</sup> with Charles Geiger on the post-WSIS process by Reza Salim

**Reza Salim (RS):** *out of the 15 or so UN World Conferences and Summits in the 1990s and 2000s, WSIS is considered to be among the most successful ones. In retrospect, what were the reasons for the success of WSIS, in your view?*

**Charles Geiger (CG):** There are numerous reasons why the World Summit on the Information Society was successful. I would like to mention only the most important ones:

- a) In the words of Kofi Annan, WSIS was “a **Summit of opportunities**”. UN Summits usually deal with a problem or a series of problems (environment, population, gender, social development, habitat, racism etc.) that should be tackled at the highest political level. WSIS had the advantage that its mandate was not to tackle an existing and difficult problem, but to **develop a vision** for the Information Society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When you are confronted with a difficult problem, usually the negotiation positions are very far away and compromise is difficult. Diplomats, in this situation, will try to limit the objectives, recommendations and commitments to the most important ones. If you deal with a vision, you can more easily find agreement on recommendations and commitments. This is what happened in WSIS. The stakeholders agreed not only on the 10 goals and objectives in part B of the Geneva Plan of Action, but also, in part C of the same document, on more than 160 recommendations and commitments. This is the flip side to the “Summit of opportunities”. As WSIS touched on nearly every aspect of modern life, it is not easy to implement the massive number of recommendations and commitments, and it is even a more difficult task review and assess progress. I shall come back to this later.

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<sup>1</sup> This interview with Charles Geiger was made by Reza Salim on 2 July 2008 in Geneva at the Palais des Nations. The footnotes were added later by Mr. Geiger to the edited text. The opinions expressed in the answers are those of the author, and do not necessarily tally with or reflect the views of the institutions with which he is or was affiliated.

- b) **The UN General Assembly tasked a specialised UN Agency, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)**, with the organization of WSIS, which was considered to be a system-wide UN Summit. Other Summits were usually organized by the UN Secretariat. Tasking ITU with the organization of the Summit was logical because the initiative to hold an Information Society Summit came from the Plenipotentiary Conference 1998 of ITU. The UN-ACC (Administrative Committee on Coordination, today called the Chief Executive Board CEB) decided in 2000 to create a High Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC) chaired by the Secretary-General of ITU. In practice, HLSOC, which was composed of the heads of most UN Agencies and Programs, did not play a major role, it was really and from the beginning ITU and its Secretary-General who took the lead in the organization of the Summit. ITU is a UN specialised Agency, but it is much older than the UN (in fact ITU is the oldest international organization in the world, created in 1865), and it is poorly represented in New York. This had a number of consequences: First, the Summit became a **Geneva-centred undertaking**. In my view, this Geneva-centeredness of WSIS is responsible for the fact that the Agencies based in New York like the UNDP or institutions like the World Bank did not play an active part in WSIS. The international organizations most active in WSIS were Geneva-based (WHO, ILO, UNCTAD, WMO, WIPO etc.) or Europe-based (UNESCO, FAO, UNIDO etc.). The Geneva-centeredness **made compromise solutions easier**. The Geneva diplomatic community is smaller than the one in New York, the relations within the community are more “matter-of-fact” and less ideological, and most diplomats in Geneva know each other, which made it easier to contain conflicts and to find agreement.

The fact that a “technical” Agency like ITU was selected to be the lead Agency for the Summit had other consequences: **most Governments of developed and developing countries considered WSIS initially to be a technically oriented Summit**. They decided therefore that those delegates covering already ITU should cover WSIS, and attributed the national Summit preparations usually in the Telecom Ministry. Only later, when the process went in the stage of agenda-setting (PrepCom-1 to 3 of the Geneva phase), they realized that WSIS had a strong social and development component (especially in the ICT applications) and also two heavy political components (Financing mechanisms and Internet Governance). Only few Governments like Switzerland and some of the Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Norway) did realize from the

very beginning the social and development aspects of WSIS and composed their delegations accordingly.

- c) **The third reason for the success of WSIS was its multi-stakeholder approach.** There were at least four elements that facilitated the multi-stakeholder approach in WSIS: The first element was that **business entities had always been partners in ITU**, and more than 700 business entities are today ITU Sector members. It was unthinkable that ITU would organize a UN Summit without business participation. Therefore, when it came to the question of accreditation of other stakeholders in the WSIS process, the fact that business entities should be accredited to WSIS was uncontested<sup>2</sup>. WSIS became therefore the second UN Summit ever to accredit individual business entities (the first Summit that allowed accreditation of individual business entities had been the Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey, Mexico, held in March 2002). Governments wanted to favour not only the existing ITU sector members, but all kind of business entities, including IT start-ups, and dropped the condition that an entity had to exist for two years to be able to request accreditation. Subsequently, this profited also civil society entities, as the condition of 2 years of existence was also dropped for them. This facilitated the accreditation process both for NGOs/civil society and for business entities.

Secondly, diplomats and delegates from the IT-Ministries had to realize during the agenda-setting process of WSIS (i.e. between PrepCom-1 and PrepCom-3 of the Geneva phase) that **they were not the only stakeholder in the Information Society**. In fact, in some fields, Governments were not stakeholders at all! While the Rules of Procedure (ROP) of WSIS are very similar to the ROP of the Johannesburg (Environment) and Monterrey (Financing for Development) Summits, in its practical application, Governments agreed to give space the other stakeholders, especially to the representatives of business and of civil society. Business organized itself in the Consultative Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI), headed by the International Chamber of Commerce, Paris (ICC) and civil society, with a little help from the Civil society division of the WSIS Executive Secretariat, organized itself around a Civil Society Plenary, around "families" and "caucuses", and created a Civil

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<sup>2</sup> The "Arrangements for accreditation", the "Arrangements for participation" and the "Rules of Procedure of the Preparatory Committee" were accepted as a package at the last day of PrepCom-1 in Geneva. They are included in the Report of PrepCom-1 at [http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc\\_single.asp?lang=en&id=14](http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_single.asp?lang=en&id=14)



Society Bureau (CSB), which became a major interlocutor for the Intergovernmental Bureau with regard to procedural questions<sup>3</sup>. During the PrepComs, delegates from international organizations, from civil society and from business were allowed to speak each day in the plenary for approx. 45 minutes, and their participation in working groups etc. was tacitly admitted, and in most cases till to the very end of the negotiations. For the first time in UN history, during the Geneva and Tunis Summit, representatives from civil society, business and from international organizations spoke directly in the Summit segment. The so-called "WSIS-practice"<sup>4</sup> is the most advanced multi-stakeholder practice of any UN-conference and is probably the closest one can get today to "global governance structures".

Thirdly, the wise decision taken by Governments during the informal preparations before PrepCom-1 of the Geneva phase to **not rotate the PrepCom-President** during the Geneva- and Tunis phase and the frequent Bureau meetings during both phases contributed to a **climate of trust** within the WSIS intergovernmental Bureau, and further between the intergovernmental Bureau members, the members of the CCBI and the members of the CSB, which made the very liberal procedural decisions regarding the interventions of civil society and business possible. This climate of trust contributed to the "WSIS spirit" that evolved in the process.

Finally, the success of the multi-stakeholder approach was also **due to the two PrepCom Presidents**, Adama Samassékou, former Minister of Education from Mali, and Janis Karklins, Ambassador of Latvia, who were both convinced that the multi-stakeholder approach was one of the core elements of WSIS and actively supported the idea.

- d) The fact that WSIS was **held in two phases** contributed to its success. WSIS was the first UN Summit held in two phases. Initially, the Summit was to take place in only one phase, but two countries offered to host WSIS, Tunisia, which had originally proposed, at the Plenipotentiary Conference of ITU in 1998, to hold an Information Society Summit, and Switzerland, the host country of ITU since

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<sup>3</sup> The Geneva Secretariat of the Conference of NGOs (CONGO) played a crucial role in this process, and was tacitly admitted to be the "civil society secretariat" during the Tunis phase of WSIS.

<sup>4</sup>A detailed account of the so-called «WSIS-practice» is at <http://www.itu.int/wsis/basic/multistakeholder.html>. We hope that the detailed account on the WSIS practice may inspire other UN Summits to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach.

1865. The Secretary-General of ITU therefore proposed to hold the Summit at both places, three days in Geneva and three days in Tunis. This proposal was backed by the ITU Council and later by the UN General Assembly in its Resolution 56/183. Holding the Summit in two phases allowed for shifting a certain number of unresolved items (i.e. Internet Governance and Financing Mechanisms) from Geneva to Tunis. It also allowed for 6 PrepComs (3 for the Geneva and 3 for the Tunis phase), which is more than the usual 3 or 4 PrepComs of other UN Summits. The 6 PrepComs did not only help to build up trust, as mentioned above, but it was also easier to reach agreement on tricky subjects, e.g. to continue discussion on Internet Governance after the Tunis Summit in the Internet Governance Forum.

- e) Finally, it would be unfair not to mention the role of SDC and of the **ICT4D Platform** during the Geneva Summit in December 2003. As I said before, most Governments did not consider WSIS to be a “development” Summit. But fortunately enough, SDC and the Global Knowledge Partnership insisted to hold, during the Geneva Summit, in parallel to the Summit and **under the same roof**, an ICT for Development (ICT4D) Platform. The Summit organizer ITU created also, within the Summit perimeter, space for numerous parallel events. All in all, around 160 parallel events were organized within the Summit perimeter by Governments, International Organizations, and by accredited civil society and business entities, and another 170 parallel events, workshops and seminars plus an exhibition were held on the Swiss-financed ICT4D Platform in Hall 4 of Palexpo (16.000 square meters). This exhibition and the ICT4D platform were sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and it was the active involvement of its director, Mr. Walter Fust, who made this possible. The contribution of SDC and the vision of its director were very important for the success of WSIS. The ICT4D Platform had more than 30'000 entries in 5 days (two days before and 3 days during the Summit), and contributed enormously to the positive image of the Geneva Summit. Due to its success, the Geneva Summit became the template for the Tunis Summit. I think without this unique Swiss contribution, neither the Geneva nor the Tunis Summit would have reached the popularity and the participation figures we have seen (more than 11'000 participants in Geneva and nearly 20'000 participants in Tunis)<sup>5</sup>. The two Summits

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<sup>5</sup> The breakdown of the participation figures are at <http://www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/newsroom/index.html> for the Geneva Summit & at <http://www.itu.int/wsis/tunis/newsroom/index.html> for the Tunis Summit

were really the most important gatherings that have ever taken place worldwide regarding the Information Society. And they were milestones in multi-stakeholder participation.

**RS: *How do you judge, in retrospect, the WSIS outcome documents?***

**CG:** The outcome documents are important, but in my view, **even more important was the WSIS process**, because the process brought together people from all parts of the planet. Just look at the figures of civil society participation: we had in Geneva 3310 civil society participants from 481 different organizations, and in Tunis 6241 civil society participants from 606 different organizations. In both Summit phases, more than 170 Governments participated, with nearly 50 heads of State and Government and more than 100 Ministers. Business was very present in Tunis, with 4816 participants from 226 different companies. Not to mention the participants from international organizations and from the press. The simple fact of having so many people gather on a single issue creates momentum, knowledge exchange, new friends and new ideas.

**RS: *This seems to be related to the "WSIS spirit" you mentioned before. What exactly is or was this "WSIS spirit"?***

**CG:** This is a difficult question, because there is no unanimous definition what the "**WSIS spirit**" is or was and I think you would get different answers if you ask different participants. I can try to hint at some elements of this "spirit". One element for sure is the trust I mentioned before that was built up during the Geneva phase of WSIS between Government representatives and representatives from NGOs, civil society and business entities. I think the turning point was PrepCom-2 of the Geneva phase, when Governments agreed to accredit several hundred NGOs and civil society entities, including entities from the scientific community and from local government (e.g. city of Geneva, city of Lyon, etc). Subsequently, at PrepCom-2, we had several days of parallel events and a very interesting morning with Information Society visionaries (like President Wade of Senegal, President Iliescu of Romania, the French economist and scholar Jacques Attali and Larry Lessig, the American Academic and political activist<sup>6</sup>). In parallel, ITU organized a visionaries conference, including Prof. Robin Mansell from the London Institute of Economics, Madanmohan Rao from India, Frances Cairncross from The Economist and Seán Ó Siochrú from CRIS<sup>7</sup>. This kind of informal "get-together" broke the ice:

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<sup>6</sup> Read their statements at <http://www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory/prepcom/pc2/visionaries/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> The presentations from ITUs "Visions of the Information Society" Conference are still available on the ITU website at

<http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/visions/Conference/index.html>

Governments started to understand the advantages of a real multi-stakeholder dialogue and, in order to elaborate the negotiation text, agreed to install a transparent text-finding process, open to all stakeholders. Between PrepCom-2 and PrepCom-3 of the Geneva phase, inputs from all accredited entities were welcomed, and the Executive Secretariat published every input on the WSIS website. Governments agreed further that the Executive Secretariat would group the inputs from Governments and from the other stakeholders, chapter by chapter, in the same document. This procedure, first used for the Paris intersession meeting in July 2003, was kept after the Paris meeting and for the rest of the WSIS process, also during the Tunis phase. Therefore, I think, part of the WSIS-spirit was **the joy of creation, the pleasure to meet and to exchange ideas in the plenary, in the subcommittees and working groups as well as in the parallel events etc. Friendships were created across the stakeholder boundaries that lasted beyond the end of the Tunis phase of WSIS.** The ICT4D Platform in Geneva and subsequently the parallel events inside the Summit Perimeter in Tunis showed that it is possible for all stakeholders in the Information Society to come together and to discuss important issues, without shouting at each other or leaving the room. This is a rare phenomenon, very often in UN meetings civil society representatives are considered either not to be sufficiently representative<sup>8</sup> or to be too critical to be valuable discussion partners, and business is most of the time not represented at all.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to keep the WSIS-spirit alive in the WSIS implementation and follow-up process. When I look at implementation, I think that the multi-stakeholder IGF Forum represents the WSIS-spirit still at its best. In the Action Line Facilitation meetings, there are many new participants that have not participated in WSIS before. There is a generational change, in the NGOs, but also in the international organizations and in the diplomatic community in Geneva. In the latter, the change is even more radical, as diplomats usually rotate on their posts every 3 to 4 years. This may be one of the reasons why only few Government officials follow the WSIS Action Line Facilitation meetings. They do not see the value of informal multi-stakeholder meetings. At the national level, most ICT policies were developed by Governments only, not in a multi-stakeholder process as proposed by WSIS. At the regional level, the UN Regional Commissions are open for participation by all stakeholders, but only few civil society entities work at regional level. Regarding follow-up, it is difficult to keep the WSIS-spirit alive, because the CSTD has its own rules of procedure, different from WSIS, and most

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<sup>8</sup> Due to the fact that the civil society interventions were discussed and agreed at the civil society Plenary meetings, and that the speakers were chosen by the same body, civil society had the necessary legitimacy. Similarly, the business interventions were discussed and agreed within the CCBI.

Government officials do not have multi-stakeholder experience or experience from the WSIS process. There is only a small nucleus of a few government officials with such experience, and only few civil society and business representatives with WSIS experience have the time and resources to follow the CSTD deliberations regarding WSIS follow-up.

**RS: *Let us come back to my initial questions about the outcome documents. How do you judge these documents, in retrospective?***

**CG:** First of all, I would like to dissipate a wrong idea: Many people think that the WSIS outcome documents are legal texts. This is not the case. **UN Summits do not produce legal documents.** The principles, targets, recommendations and commitments contained in the WSIS outcome documents are **moral obligations**, not legal obligations. UN Summit documents are **not** for signature and ratification. Conferences which produce legal texts usually need many months if not years of negotiation. Secondly, it is not up to me to make a final judgement about the outcome documents of WSIS, because history will judge the importance of the outcome texts. But I can of course reflect on them, like you or any other participant. Also, I would like to avoid going into details, but rather look at the big picture.

As you know, the WSIS texts are not the first intergovernmental texts on the Information Society. There is e.g. the "Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society"<sup>9</sup>, agreed by the Kyushu-Okinawa Summit of the G8 in 2000. But it was of course easier to find agreement among 8 like-minded and industrialized countries than among the more than 170 developed and developing countries present at WSIS. History will retain the WSIS outcome documents as the first really worldwide approved vision documents on the Information Society. And the surprise is that despite being the product of a UN Summit, they contain more than just the minimum common denominator. The introductory paragraph 1 of the **Geneva Declaration of Principles**<sup>10</sup> refers to 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....". This is a **landmark paragraph** which confirms that the people-centred approach of the UN Social Summit 1995 should apply in the development of the Information Society. Paragraph 2 of the Geneva Declaration refers to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and expresses the hope that ICTs can be harnessed for the development goals of the MDGs, and paragraph 4 confirms that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/summit/2000okinawa/gis.htm>

<sup>10</sup> All WSIS outcome documents are available at <http://www.itu.int/wsindex.html>

Rights<sup>11</sup> is also valid in cyberspace. Paragraph 4 also contains a reference to Communication as a fundamental social process<sup>12</sup>. The **Geneva Plan of Action** contains an important number of recommendations and commitments. Unfortunately, Governments could not agree, in the Geneva phase, on a text regarding financial mechanisms, and on a solution regarding Internet Governance. Therefore, these two themes were postponed to the Tunis phase.

The original intention of ITU and the two host countries was to look in Tunis more at the development side of the Information Society, and to assess the implementation that had taken place since Geneva. This concept was changed due to the circumstances. While everyone agreed that the Tunis phase should also deal with an implementation mechanism (not with an "assessment" of implementation as originally proposed, which would anyway have been too early) and create a follow-up mechanism, it was imperative to find solutions to the two "left-over" themes from Geneva, namely financial mechanisms and Internet Governance.

Negotiations during the Tunis phase of the Summit were more difficult than during the Geneva phase, as there was no possibility to postpone any theme to a third phase. Tunisia insisted that the Tunis Summit, like the Geneva Summit, should have a political and an operational outcome text. The negotiations were facilitated by a "Friends of the Chair" mechanism installed by the President of the PrepComs of the Tunis phase, Ambassador Janis Karklins. Some of the "Friends of the chair" meetings were open to all stakeholders, a novelty in UN Summits. The political outcome text is the "**Tunis Commitment**". On the operational side, the task was to find final agreements on the three themes "financial mechanisms for meeting the challenges of ICT for development", "Internet governance" and "implementation and follow-up". The three themes are identical with the three content chapters of the "**Tunis Agenda for the Information Society**". Let us look at them separately:

- On **financial mechanisms for meeting the challenges of ICT for development**, the handicap was that a private initiative, backed by some African Governments, had agreed in Geneva (outside the WSIS process, but related to it) to create a private Foundation ruled by Swiss Private law called "Digital Solidarity Fund", on a voluntary basis. The fact that such a fund had been created, even if it was not an intergovernmental fund, hampered further discussions. Developed countries were not eager to create a new intergovernmental funding mechanism with new administrative costs

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

<sup>12</sup> On the genesis of this part of Article 4, see <http://www.itu.int/wsis/basic/articles/osiochru.html>

etc. While developing countries did not agree with this position, they did not want to risk a failure of the Tunis Summit. Finally, Governments agreed, in order to avoid dissent, to welcome the existing voluntary Digital Solidarity Fund. Therefore, I think we can clearly say the outcome regarding financial mechanisms is (at least from the point of view of the developing countries) beyond expectations.

- Regarding **Internet Governance**, time was still not ripe for a final solution, therefore, and due to the efforts and the ability of the main negotiator of this chapter, Ambassador Masood Khan from Pakistan, Governments agreed to ask the UN Secretary-General to create an "Internet Governance Forum" in order to continue the multi-stakeholder dialogue on Internet Governance. This is probably the single most important outcome of the Tunis phase of WSIS and I consider this as the best possible outcome (in November 2005) on the theme of Internet Governance. The outcome was unanimously applauded by all stakeholders and Ambassador Khan got a standing ovation.
- On **implementation and follow-up**, agreement was reached only at the last minute. Implementation was considered to be a task for all stakeholders and at all levels (national, regional and international), and no specification like "who should do what" was introduced. Regarding follow-up, Governments asked ECOSOC to task the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) with WSIS follow-up at regional and international. Governments did **not agree to task the CSTD with implementation, nor with follow-up at national level, and refused the idea of a permanent Secretariat for WSIS implementation**. Anyway, such a secretariat, in order to be a valid interlocutor and partner, would have had to be a multi-stakeholder undertaking, and Governments could not agree on taking such a step into uncharted territory. As a consequence, **there is no entity or organization tasked with the coordination of WSIS implementation**<sup>13</sup>. As a last minute default solution, Governments agreed that the different UN-entities in charge of specific WSIS themes should gather all stakeholders, from time to time, at informal

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<sup>13</sup> At the UN level, Governments asked the UN Secretary General to create a UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS), in order to facilitate the implementation of WSIS outcomes within the UN agencies and programs. But trying to coordinate UN agencies and programs is like herding cats. UNIGS, at present, has not yet proven its ability to coordinate the UN-system-wide implementation of WSIS.

“Action Line Facilitation” meetings<sup>14</sup>. These meetings should help to avoid duplication of activities, create knowledge and exchange information and best practices.

I think the outcome regarding implementation and follow-up is acceptable, but compared to other Summits, where Governments agreed on a permanent secretariat and where a separate Commission (e.g. Commission on Sustainable Development, Commission on Social Development, Commission on the Status of Women etc.) deals not only with follow-up, but also with implementation, the text of the Tunis Agenda is rather weak. If you also consider that the targets in chapter B of the Geneva Plan of Action have no benchmark and no indicators, and that most of recommendations and commitments made in chapter C of the Geneva Plan of Action are not quantified and do very often not indicate the main responsible(s) for implementation, you are heading for some difficulties regarding implementation and follow-up.

**RS: *Well, this brings me to my next question: What are, in your view, the biggest difficulties in WSIS implementation and follow-up?***

**CG:** Let us first look at implementation. Implementation is what happens in the field, at every level, national, regional and international. In a second step, we shall look at follow-up, which is, in WSIS language, review and assessment of implementation.

As I mentioned before, one of the difficulties in implementation is that the Geneva Plan of Action, in chapter 3, does not always specify who should implement what. The Tunis Agenda concludes that implementation should take place at all levels, national, regional and international, and by all stakeholders. This in itself is not very helpful. Of course there are certain recommendations which are clearly directed at Governments (e.g. to create an enabling legal and economic environment, or to mainstream ICT policies into national development and/or Poverty Reduction Strategies, which are both typical government tasks, even if the PRSPs should be created in a multi-stakeholder process). But in many cases, the recommendations and commitments can be implemented by different stakeholders. As an example, look at the commitment regarding access of disabled persons to the Information society: While the World Wide Web Consortium W3C is involved in standard setting<sup>15</sup>, business can contribute with its own developments and with making their

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<sup>14</sup> See paragraph 108-110 of the Tunis Agenda

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>



websites more accessible<sup>16</sup>, governments can legislate through Disability Discrimination Acts and can make their e-government websites more accessible, and international organizations can support the process with conferences and awareness-raising through programs and projects etc.. In the Geneva preparatory process, between PrepCom-2 and PrepCom-3, the Executive Secretariat tried to create a matrix of who should do what in implementation, but it became quickly clear that it would be impossible to reach agreement on such a matrix within the given time frame. Therefore, each stakeholder, when it comes to implementation, has to define its own responsibility. There is no coordination mechanism, and no entity to tell national Governments or any other stakeholder if they are on track with implementation or not.

With regard to follow-up, the biggest difficulties for the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) in review and assessment of WSIS implementation are the sheer number of recommendations and commitments. As I mentioned before when I spoke about the "Summit of opportunities", the Geneva Plan of Action contains not only 10 targets, but also more than 160 recommendations and commitments. The targets are contained in chapter B (e.g. to connect, by 2015, villages, hospitals, libraries etc). The targets have a time frame, but no benchmarks, and comparable national statistics that would help to measure progress<sup>17</sup> are missing. With regard to the recommendations and commitments in chapter C, they are mostly not quantified (some are not even quantifiable) and do not contain benchmarks either. Chapter C has 11 Action Lines (and Action Line C7 on ICT-applications has 7 sub-action lines), covering nearly all fields of human activity. And on top of this, you have two themes in the Tunis Agenda, financial mechanisms and Internet Governance, for which the CSTD is also tasked with follow-up.

Therefore, in the absence of benchmarks and indicators, the CSTD has to base its review and assessment of WSIS-implementation at regional and international level (the mandate does not include the national level!) to a large extent on careful observation of the overall ICT-environment, on the annual

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.nomensa.com/news/at-nomensa/2006/4/ftse-100-websites-fail-accessibility-requirements.html>

<sup>17</sup> If you take e.g. the first target on village connectivity: There is no internationally agreed definition what a « village » is. There are two interesting documents on this and similar problems, the first is chapter 6 in the World Bank publication "2006 Information and Communications for Development, Global Trends and Policies", available for free download at <http://go.worldbank.org/PB9HXOOUR0> and the second is the recent publication "Measuring Information and Communication Technology availability in villages and rural areas " also available for free download at [http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/Measuring%20ICT\\_web.pdf](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/Measuring%20ICT_web.pdf)

ICT trend analysis<sup>18</sup> published by the CSTD Secretariat and on assessments received by the Action Line Facilitators, who should report to the CSTD on a yearly basis on activities by all stakeholders within their Action Line<sup>19</sup>. **In my view, the task for the CSTD is to really look at the big picture.** I don't think that the CSTD can assess and follow up on every recommendation and commitment. **The Commission, in my view, should intervene and report to ECOSOC on developments that are heading politically into a wrong direction or on developments that violate basic WSIS commitments and recommendations.**

Unfortunately, the CSTD Secretariat is understaffed (at least compared to the secretariats of other functional Commissions of the UN) and the few funds available for consultancies do not allow for mandating consultants beyond 2009. It is my hope that the Commission Secretariat will receive new funds from interested Governments to accomplish its difficult task.

**RS: *It seems that the Action Line Facilitation, as proposed in the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, has not worked the way it was intended. What is your opinion?***

**CG:** The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society decided that "Action Line Facilitation" should be organized taking into account the themes and action lines of the Geneva Plan of Action, and moderated or facilitated by UN-Agencies when appropriate. As I mentioned before, the "Action Line Facilitation" was the way out of a negotiation trap, as the delegates could not reach consensus on an implementation coordination mechanism. The whole idea of informal "Action Line Facilitation" with all stakeholders dealing with a specific WSIS theme **was new to the United Nations.** No UN Summit before had ever used this kind of informal platform for implementation. There are many open questions, including organisational ones like the question who can participate in such meetings, due to the fact that the two WSIS phases are over and that there is no accreditation procedure for WSIS anymore. Due to the informal and open character of the meeting, it was tacitly admitted that the meetings are open to all interested parties, even to representatives from entities not accredited to WSIS and to individual participants. (A similar decision was taken tacitly by the Internet Governance

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<sup>18</sup> See e.g. the first part of the WSIS follow-up 2008 Report at [http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/none20081\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/none20081_en.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> That Action Line Facilitators should report to the CSTD is not contained in the WSIS outcome documents, it was decided by ECOSOC in its resolution regarding the flow of information for the follow-up of the World Summit on the Information Society, ECOSOC Resolution 2007/8, see the text at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/490/14/PDF/N0749014.pdf?OpenElement> pages 26 and 27

Forum regarding participation in the IGF meetings, and also the GAID events offer a similar platform for all interested participants). The main difficulties of these informal meetings are in my view the following:

- A first meeting on Action Line Facilitation took place in February 2006, organized by ITU, UNESCO and UNDP. At this meeting, unfortunately, the distribution of the Action Lines among the different UN Agencies was made in a hurry. Some UN-Agencies suddenly found themselves in the role of an Action Line Facilitator, even if this had never been discussed with their top management. As a result, some Action Lines (e.g. C4 and C6, where UNDP received a facilitation mandate, or C7 e-environment, where the WMO received a provisional mandate for facilitation) were subsequently not facilitated adequately.
- For Governments, the informal Action Line Facilitation meetings, held mostly in Geneva (some were held at UNESCO in Paris in 2007), are not a priority. They are informal, and there is no risk of decision. Also, due to the generation change I mentioned earlier, few diplomats in Geneva are still well informed about WSIS. Therefore only few Government officials follow these meetings. Instead of an exchange of information and best practices, the respective UN Agency in charge of facilitation is presenting its WSIS-related agenda of work and the participants, mostly from civil society, make proposals for new projects and programs. This is contrary to the original idea of a platform to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices among all stakeholders.

In May 2008, UNESCO organized a meeting around the theme of low cost computers for education. This meeting became a real exchange of information and experience and was a success. I think that the Action Line facilitators may have to re-think the way these meetings are held, and also how to make these meetings more attractive (regroup and merge?). The Tunis Agenda proposes to hold these meetings "taking into account the themes and action lines of the Geneva Plan of Action", but **we have to keep in mind that a) the different Action Lines of the Geneva Plan of Action are not a scientific subdivision of the themes of the Information Society, they are the result of a negotiation process and they contain omissions and overlaps, that b) the Geneva Plan of Action is from 2003 and a that the digital environment is changing fast and that c) not all Action Lines receive, or meet with, the same interest.** Some are more technical than

others (e.g. security is very technical), some have a very general audience (e.g. C8 cultural diversity and identity) and others are more targeted to one community (e.g. C9 media).

- At a meeting of Action Line Facilitators on 24 May 2008 at ITU, several proposals were made, not only for changing the facilitator in some cases, but also to regroup the different facilitation meetings into a yearly 3 days "WSIS implementation meeting" or similar to be held in Geneva in conjunction with the World Information Society Day (17 May), the IGF consultations and the CSTD session (usually third week of May). It was agreed that these new ideas should be widely consulted by ITU with all WSIS stakeholders, and we shall in a few months what the outcome of this consultation will be.

***RS: You mentioned just now that the Geneva Plan of Action is from 2003 and that some of its content may be outdated, given the fact that the Information Society is evolving rapidly. Can you give us an example of something that has not been considered adequately during WSIS, some new and emerging theme?***

**CG:** Well, the recent exponential increase of mobile telephony especially in developing countries was something we did not expect in 2003. Regarding the development aspects of the new ICTs, WSIS focused more on the Internet, on the possibilities of the PC and on community access through village access points and telecenters etc. What I observe now is that individual access to ICTs (through mobile phones) is superseding community access, which was one of the credos of WSIS. By November 2007, there were more than 3,3 billion mobile telephony subscriptions in the World. If you consider that some countries have penetration rates of more than 100%, you can consider that at some time in autumn 2008 we will reach the threshold where 50% of the World's population have access to ICTs, albeit mostly through the mobile phone. This would mean that **we would have reached in 2008 a target in Chapter B of the Geneva Plan of Action which we planned to reach in 2015:** "to ensure that [by 2015] half of the World's inhabitants have access to ICTs within their reach"!

Regarding financial mechanisms for meeting the challenges for ICT for development, we also have some new developments: While the overall outcome of this theme in the Tunis Agenda is not very satisfactory, there are new developments regarding Universal Access and Universal Service funds. Within the regulatory reforms of the 1990s, and thereafter based on the

suggestions of WSIS, many Governments created **Universal Access or Universal Service Funds**<sup>20</sup>. The basic idea of the Universal service funds is to promote the availability of ICT services (usually telephony) to all consumers, including those in low income, rural, insular, and high cost areas at rates that are reasonably comparable to those charged in urban areas. Universal Access funds typically promote the installation of public payphones or public call offices in rural or remote villages or low-income urban areas with the aim of providing a basic and initial connection to the public telecommunications network. Whereas those two terms focused initially on the provision of basic telecommunications, they increasingly encompass value-added services and Internet services/access. **Recent surveys show that these funds are under-used** and that more money is flowing into the funds than out of the funds, due mostly to policy restrictions. The GSM Association considers that more than 4 billion US\$ are stored in unused Universal services funds worldwide, which could be used to extend coverage to an additional 0.45 billion people living in rural areas<sup>21</sup>. I am not sure if it is the best idea to pump these billions back to the mobile phone operators in the form of subsidies, but I think that an intelligent use of these funds (e.g. for public backbone projects, public WiMax or LTE access points, Telecenter projects, public Internet Exchange points etc.) could be made and that Governments with underused Universal Access or Services Funds should look at new ways of using these funds for the benefit of rural or otherwise disadvantaged communities.

**RS: *You mentioned earlier that most Governments did not consider WSIS to be a "development" Summit. But there are a number of references to poverty reduction and the MDGs. What is, in your view, the "development" value of WSIS, especially with regard to poverty reduction?***

**CG:** All UN Summits deal in one way or the other with the three main thrust areas of the United Nations: development and social justice, human rights, and peace and security, and it was very clear for the diplomats that WSIS should continue the ICT and development debate which had started with the Ministerial Declaration of the high-level segment of ECOSOC in 2000 on the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy<sup>22</sup>, and which continued in the Millennium Declaration<sup>23</sup> paragraph 20, where Governments resolved that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies, should be available to all. The

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<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.inteleconresearch.com/pdf/ua%20funds%202004%20update.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/partners/GILF/2008/contributions/qsama.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/background/resolutions/55-3.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/background/resolutions/55-2.pdf>

first General Assembly Resolution on WSIS, A/RES/56/183<sup>24</sup> recognized “the urgent need to harness the potential of knowledge and technology for promoting the goals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration” and the need “to promote the urgently needed access of all countries to information, knowledge and communication technologies for development”. Therefore WSIS had an overall development focus, especially when you understand “development” as economic development. However, even if WSIS makes several references to the MDGs, and takes up poverty reduction concerns e.g. in paragraphs 2, 14, 41, 43 and 51 of the Geneva Declaration and in paragraphs 23 f), 85, 87, 90 i) 91, 95, 100 and 114 c) of the Tunis Agenda, **the WSIS outcome documents, in my view, do not contain a clear conceptual framework or a strategy how ICTs should be used for poverty reduction/alleviation.** The best you can find is that productivity gains through ICTs should be distributed equally, to benefit also the poor, and that ICTs should be integrated into national development strategies and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The words “empower” and “empowerment” are rarely used in the WSIS outcome documents. The only paragraph referring to the concept of empowering the poor is paragraph 14 of the Geneva Declaration. Paragraph 11 h) of the Geneva Plan of Action refers to empowering of communities. Otherwise the word “empowerment” is only related to youth (twice) or to women's empowerment (three references). This lack of a clear strategy is probably due to at least three reasons:

- a) In the original schedule of work, the understanding was that the Geneva phase would deal with an overall political declaration and with a general Plan of Action, while the Tunis phase would deal more specifically with the development aspects of the new (and old) ICTs. As you know, this schedule did not work. The Tunis phase was mostly used to deal with the two left-over themes from Geneva, and especially the theme of Internet Governance captured the attention not only of Governments, but of all stakeholders. Internet Governance literally “overshadowed” the Tunis Phase. This is why I said sometimes that the Tunis phase of WSIS had been “hijacked” by the issue of Internet Governance, which did not leave time for the delegates to have a more profound discussion on the development and especially on the poverty reduction and empowerment aspects of the old and new ICTs. But to be fair, Internet Governance is a very important geo-strategic subject and has a lot of implications for the future of the Information Society.

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<sup>24</sup> See [http://www.itu.int/wsisis/docs/background/resolutions/56\\_183\\_unqa\\_2002.pdf](http://www.itu.int/wsisis/docs/background/resolutions/56_183_unqa_2002.pdf)

- b) WSIS was an extremely broad exercise. Just look at the different working groups and caucuses in civil society, that contributed to the WSIS outcome texts: Besides the regional caucuses, there were working groups and caucuses *inter alia* on community media, on cultural and linguistic diversity, on e-government, on education, on environment, on finance, on gender, on health, on human rights, on indigenous people, on Internet governance, on media, on patents, copyrights and trademarks, on persons with disabilities, on privacy and security, on science, on trade unions, on telecenters, on values and ethics, on volunteering and on youth and ICTs<sup>25</sup>. They all tried to make a contribution to the WSIS outcome texts. Note the absence of a working group or caucus on poverty reduction! During WSIS preparatory meetings, most NGOs present were advocacy NGOs from the North, and only few social activists from the South with field experience participated in WSIS, due to the high costs or travel and accommodation in Geneva. The discussion on how to use ICTs for poverty reduction did therefore rather take place in the Summit parallel events<sup>26</sup>.
- c) There is an ITU-bias in the WSIS outcome texts, a certain degree of techno-optimism, embedded in a general discourse of modernity. ITU did not set the Agenda, but as I explained before, the delegates that set the Agenda were mostly the same delegates dealing with ITU matters in general in Geneva. This gave a somewhat technology-driven approach to WSIS. This is not a critique of ITU, I just think that any lead Agency will somehow influence the "atmosphere" of the negotiations. ITU's competence and concerns are more on access to physical infrastructure and security. If WSIS would have been organized by UNESCO, we would have talked more about access to content, about information for all, education for all and about "knowledge societies".

Don't get me wrong, WSIS **has** a development perspective. What is missing in the texts is a real poverty reduction/eradication **strategy**. There is a link between the deployment of ICTs and economic development in general. We have statistical evidence of a correlation between the percentage of Internet users in a given country and the Gross National Income per capita<sup>27</sup>. In today's

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<sup>25</sup> A full list is at <http://www.wsis-cs.org/caucuses.html>

<sup>26</sup> An excellent event on ICTs for poverty reduction was organised at the Tunis Summit by SIDA, the Swedish Development Agency. An account of the Panel is in the second part of the following page: <http://www.worldsummit2003.de/en/nav/14.htm> and the accompanying paper by Alan Greenberg at <http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/sidaictpoverty.pdf> is among the best papers ever written on the subject.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. figure 2.8 on page 28 of the World Information Society Report 2007, available at

global economy, any country that is not sufficiently linked up to the World will have difficulties to compete in the market. It is clearly visible from the statistics that insufficient or costly access to the Internet is a handicap for economic growth. But this is a macro-economic view. A higher Gross National Income per capita does not always mean development for all. Anyone with field experience in Latin America, Africa or South Asia knows that inequality matters. **Not all growth benefits the poor<sup>28</sup>. Even worse: ICTs can be a source of inequalities.** And here we are back to my previous observation: Even if it is quite obvious that ICTs do contribute in different ways to the economic development of a country, the **WSIS outcome texts do not contain an overall conceptual framework how to make use of the old and new ICTs for poverty reduction and reaching the MDGs.**

The fact that the WSIS outcome texts do not have a conceptual framework would be less of a problem if the Millennium Declaration would contain such a framework. But if you read the Declaration and look at the MDGs, which were developed out of the Declaration in a negotiation process among the UN, IMF, World Bank and OECD in 2000, you will see that there is no strategy or conceptual framework either<sup>29</sup>. **The MDGs are targets, but they are not a strategy.** Regarding ICTs, one of the problems is also the fragility of the database. ICTs are mentioned in Goal 8, which was added later and which is the basket for all those matters that was not dealt with in Goals 1-7. All targets under goal 8 do not contain quantitative time-bound commitments, but mere general declarations of intent. Target 8f related to ICTs has three indicators: the number of telephone lines per 100 population, the number of cellular subscribers per 100 population and the number of Internet users per 100 population. These three indicators will never answer our questions about the impact of ICTs, and especially not our question **how to make use** of ICTs for poverty reduction.

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[http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/publications/worldinformationsociety/2007/WISR07\\_full-free.pdf](http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/publications/worldinformationsociety/2007/WISR07_full-free.pdf) . But this correlation is, at least partly, a chicken and egg problem. It is quite logical that Internet penetration is higher in countries with a higher Gross National Income per capita. The statistical data does not answer the question if the higher Gross National Income per capita is due to the increase of Internet penetration, or if it is the other way round, that the increased Gross National Income per capita created the demand for more Internet connections, which was subsequently met by network operators. There is ongoing research on this question.

<sup>28</sup> Excellent on this, Nancy Birdsall in <http://bostonreview.net/BR32.2/birdsall.php> The World Development Report 2006, available at <http://go.worldbank.org/UWYLBR43C0> and the Human Development Report 2005, available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2005/> also focus on inequality.

<sup>29</sup> This is not a critique of the MDGs, who have proven to be effective in stimulating public interest and global campaigns and have a considerable political mobilisation impact. Due to the fact that the MDGs are not a strategy, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan mandated the UN Millennium Project, headed by Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, to fill the gap, but the Project remained an advisory body, and the final Report of the Project, "Investing in Development", published for the Millennium+5 Summit in 2005, was criticized by other researchers. Some argued that the Report fails to deal with the structural root causes of poverty, such as unequal distribution of wealth, land and political power, as well as unfair global trade rules, see e.g. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/soecon/develop/2008/09mdacrisis.pdf>



**RS: *If I understand you correctly, if we really want to get serious about using ICTs for poverty reduction and reaching the MDGs, the need of the hour is to develop a conceptual framework, because it is not contained in the WSIS outcome texts?***

**CG: Yes, I really think that we need such a framework.** But I don't think that we need to develop a new framework, it is possible, in my view, to use an existing framework and put it in relation to the WSIS outcome texts. Several conceptual frameworks for poverty reduction were proposed in the past. In my view, a very appropriate framework was developed by World Bank staff under the direction of Ravi Kanbur in the World Development Report (WDR) 2000/2001 "Attacking Poverty"<sup>30</sup>. This Report is based on the capability approach developed by Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen and by Martha Nussbaum. The approach is not ICT-specific, but can easily be adapted for our purpose. The WDR 2000/2001 has another advantage, it was not developed in a top-down manner by University professors or "poverty experts" from the North. The basis for the Report was a very large participatory research initiative called "Voices of the Poor"<sup>31</sup>. For this research initiative, the World Bank collected the voices of more than 60,000 poor women and men (they are the real poverty experts!) from 60 countries, in an unprecedented effort to understand poverty from a bottom-up perspective. **"Voices of the poor" and subsequently the WDR 2000/2001 recognized that poverty is more than inadequate income, it is also vulnerability, a lack of opportunities and a lack of voice, power, and representation.** With this multidimensional view of poverty comes greater complexity in poverty reduction strategies, because more factors - such as social and cultural forces - need to be taken into account. The Report proposes to deal with this complexity through the creation of enhanced **opportunities**, through **empowerment** and participation at the local, national and international level and through enhanced **security** for poor people. The three main chapters of the Report therefore are: **opportunity, empowerment, and security.** When it comes to ICTs for poverty reduction, I would change the order and start with **empowerment** (remember: this word is used only three times in the four WSIS outcome texts, and always related to women's empowerment only). Interestingly, the original draft of Ravi Kanbur's team was also starting with empowerment, but I think the World Bank management thought that this

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<sup>30</sup> See <http://go.worldbank.org/L8RGH3WL10> . My choice of the WDR 2000/2001 as a framework for the implementation of WSIS recommendations and commitments on poverty reduction through ICTs is based on my personal experience in rural development projects in Central America and in India.

<sup>31</sup> <http://go.worldbank.org/H1N8746X10>

is too "subversive" and asked for a change of order, stressing at the same time that all three chapters are equally important<sup>32</sup>.

A very quick overview shows that **ICTs can be a powerful tool for empowerment of poor people**<sup>33</sup>. "Empowerment" refers broadly to the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life. It implies control over resources and decisions<sup>34</sup>. As Deepa Narayan explains: "Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives"<sup>35</sup>. Experiences of many NGOs show that ICTs (especially local radio, but also video, the Internet and very recently mobile phones) can empower weaker sections of the community. Paolo Freire, if he would still be with us, would probably speak about "conscientization" through ICTs. I think he would consider ICTs as a "liberation technology". Empowerment is also a method for deepening democracy and participation. It can be used by NGOs and Governments alike. The new technologies (especially web.2.0 applications on the Internet, and mobile phones) have the advantage that the user can decide what knowledge he/she would like to access. The focus of NGOs usually is on groups that social discrimination processes have excluded from decision-making processes through - for example - discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion or gender. The focus of Governments may be larger: Government can make general use of ICTs e.g. in decentralization projects, in order to create better governance, more transparency and accountability. A good example is the Akshaya Project in Kerala<sup>36</sup>, which started as an e-governance project related to decentralization and Panchayat Raj but has today a much wider scope. The use of ICTs by Governments can help curbing corruption (e.g. through e-government and m-government, e-procurement and e-customs projects), which profits all citizens, including the poor. A recent publication of OXFAM confirms that access to knowledge and information is an essential tool for citizenship: "Knowledge expands horizons, allows people to make informed choices and strengthens their ability to demand their rights. Ensuring access to knowledge is integral to enabling poor people to tackle the deep inequalities of power and voice that entrench inequality across the world"<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> This was probably one of the reasons why Ravi Kanbur left the WDR team before the publication of the Report. The Bank is excellent in research, but often poor when it comes to convert its research into action (read: lending).

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. the UNDP study "Empowering the poor, ICTs for Governance and Poverty Reduction" at <http://www.unapcict.org/ecohub/resources/empowering-the-poor-information-and-communications>

<sup>34</sup> Measuring empowerment, a cross-disciplinary perspective, edited by Deepa Narayan, The World Bank, Washington, DC, 2005, page 4

<sup>35</sup> Narayan 2005, op.cit. page 5

<sup>36</sup> See the Akshaya website at <http://www.akshaya.net/>. Very interesting is the page on the genesis of Akshaya.

<sup>37</sup> From Poverty to Power, Duncan Green, with a foreword by Amartya Sen, OXFAM 2008, pages 52 ff.

I would not hesitate to include, in this chapter on empowerment, the distance education projects<sup>38</sup>, and the ICT-based literacy campaigns<sup>39</sup> and health and sanitation awareness projects<sup>40</sup>. Film and video can be used to reach out to illiterate people (one of the reasons why bandwidth is important also in rural areas). In the same chapter on empowerment belongs also the “communication for development” (or short C4D) approach, e.g. of PANOS<sup>41</sup>, as well as the efforts of the Communications Initiative Network<sup>42</sup>, the Global Knowledge Partnership<sup>43</sup>, the telecenter.org community<sup>44</sup>, the Communication for Social Change Consortium<sup>45</sup> and the Access to Knowledge (A2K)<sup>46</sup> movement, among others. On the research side I would mention especially the research of Manuel Castells<sup>47</sup> and Jan Servaes<sup>48</sup> and their teams. Finally, in my view, the different movements fighting for access to information<sup>49</sup> belong into the same category: Worldwide more than 70 countries have already in one way or the other a “Freedom of Information” legislation<sup>50</sup> which allows citizens to access all Government information that is not classified and which enhances transparency and accountability of the Government and helps poor people to fight for their rights.

It is undeniable that ICTs can also have a mass mobilization effect. I did hesitate for some time to discuss this aspect under the heading “empowerment”, but any development or poverty reduction strategy that challenges existing unequal power relations has a political dimension. So, if we are lucid, we have to deal with this aspect of (collective and political) empowerment: Governments got a first taste of the power of the Internet at Seattle in 1994: The massive protests by civil society at the WTO ministerial meeting were mainly organized by e-mail. And just a few years ago, a new technology, more difficult to control than radio and television broadcast, entered the mass markets of the developing countries: the mobile phone. Several recent protest marches in the Philippines against the Government were

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<sup>38</sup> This is typically the domain of UNESCO, see e.g.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001284/128463e.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Also a UNESCO domain, see e.g. : <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001464/146426e.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> A nice example is at <http://www.iicd.org/projects/articles/iicdprojects.2005-07-05.1690547770>

<sup>41</sup> See the PANOS publications at <http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=257>,

<http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=19969> and <http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=248>

<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.comminet.com/>

<sup>43</sup> See <http://www.globalknowledge.org/>

<sup>44</sup> See <http://www.telecentre.org/>

<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/> Their 2001 publication “Making Waves” about the power of community decision making in Latin America, Africa and Asia is still a landmark, free of cost at [http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/pdf/making\\_waves.pdf](http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/pdf/making_waves.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> See e.g. <http://www.law.yale.edu/intellectuallife/informationssocietyproject.htm>

<sup>47</sup> See <http://annenberq.usc.edu/Faculty/Communication/CastellsM.aspx>

<sup>48</sup> See [http://www.umass.edu/communication/faculty\\_staff/servaes.shtml](http://www.umass.edu/communication/faculty_staff/servaes.shtml)

<sup>49</sup> A good example is the work of MKSS in Rajasthan, see <http://www.mkssindia.org/>

<sup>50</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_of\\_information\\_legislation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_information_legislation)

organized by SMS. In Kenya, most information about the recent troubles did spread by mobile phone. In Tibet, the Chinese authorities had to find out that even monks know how to make use of mobile phones. The power of these new media cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately, there is also a flip side to their mass mobilization effect. It can also be used for negative purposes: Radio Mille Collines (RTL) played a crucial role in creating the atmosphere of charged racial hostility that allowed the genocide in Rwanda to occur. While democratic Governments have installed a certain level of democratic control over the traditional mass media radio and television, the debate about the level of international control over Internet content is still ongoing, and the mobile phone applications are, at present, nearly out of any Government control. Secondly, the new ICTs can be used as a **tool to enhance opportunities**, especially economic opportunities. And let us be clear, we are not talking here about the macro level (linking up countries with fiber-optic submarine cables), and also not about the meso level (use of ICTs by companies to increase efficiency). We are talking about the micro and household level. There are the well-known examples of the fishermen in Kerala using mobile phones out at sea to find out the market price for fish in the different harbours along the Malabar coast. Since quite a long time already, the daily prices for silk cocoons in the different markets in Karnataka are on the web, and farmers can optimise their income by choosing the local market that pays the best price for their cocoons. Such information also helps farmers not to become victims of middlemen who pay too low a price. A recent study shows the impact of mobile phones on grain markets in Niger<sup>51</sup>. Another, more anthropological, study shows the general (but also the economic) impact of mobile phones on villagers in West Bengal<sup>52</sup>. The newest trend is to offer market information also through SMS or through a literate intermediary who will access the information for you. The latter is a very practical solution for illiterate persons. I truly believe that ICTs **can** create economic opportunities of poor people, but we should not overestimate the tool: No amount of ICTs will replace a field of one's own for a landless family.

Finally, it is easy to find examples for ICTs as a **tool to increase human security**: The range goes from tsunami warnings to hurricane watch, monsoon forecasts, long-term weather and crop information, information about wave heights and wind speeds for rural fishermen<sup>53</sup> etc. I think that you have good examples for this in Bangladesh, especially regarding the storm forecasts in the Bay of Bengal. Another field for ICTs is disaster mitigation and recovery. Also, the use of ICTs in health (e.g. through the use of electronic

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<sup>51</sup> See <http://www.cellular-news.com/story/29361.php>

<sup>52</sup> Sirpa Tenhunen, Mobile technology in the village: ICTs, culture, and social logistics in India, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, September 2008

<sup>53</sup> See as an example <http://www.disasterwatch.net/Best%20Practices/MSSRF.htm>

registers) can contribute to more human and maternal security. But I would like to enlarge this picture: The multilateral donors (especially the World Bank and the IMF) have for a long time underestimated the importance of institutions like agricultural extension, health services, veterinary services and even courts and schools. Under the "Washington consensus", World Bank loans were often conditioned to the abolishment of government-run services in favour of privatization. Poor people rely on affordable services, they are their safety network, and ICTs can be used to strengthen these services. You know that I am a lawyer by profession, so let me take the example of courts: Lawlessness and the absence of the rule of law is a big problem for poor people. If courts do not anymore have a backlog of several years, it means that the rule of law may finally become accessible also for poor people, and this **is** important for poverty reduction. If Government-run schools have access to ICTs, they can compete with the private schools. Health and veterinary services can be improved by linking up the different health and veterinary centres. And by digitizing the land registers<sup>54</sup>, the Government contributes to stabilize the land rights, for rich and poor alike, and makes land grabbing by powerful landlords more difficult.

Just for the record, I would like to mention some ICT-specific frameworks, like the "8C" approach of Mr. Madanmohan Rao<sup>55</sup>, or the "12C" approach of UNCTAD in the Information Economy Report 2006<sup>56</sup>. These ICT-specific frameworks are valuable tools, they help us not to forget that capacity building is important, that not everybody speaks English or Chinese (the two most popular languages on the Internet) and that increasing opportunities and human security has also to do with the creation of content in local language. Nevertheless, these ICT-specific frameworks do not answer the question of **how exactly** ICTs work for poverty reduction. For this, in my view, general frameworks like the capability approach described above or the basic needs approach are probably more appropriate. And for anyone interested in the field of rural poverty, I would recommend the synthesis paper of the IFAD side event at the WSIS Geneva Summit "Fighting rural poverty, the role of ICTs"<sup>57</sup> and especially the keynote address by Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron "What can ICTs do for the rural poor"<sup>58</sup>. The two documents stress that the emphasis must be on communication, not technology. Communication implies participation, sharing of knowledge in a horizontal way, and respect for diversity and culture.

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<sup>54</sup> See e.g. the Bhoomi project in Karnataka, India, at <http://www.bhoomi.kar.nic.in/>

<sup>55</sup> See <http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/visions/developing/paper1.html>

<sup>56</sup> See [http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/sdteecb20061ch3\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/sdteecb20061ch3_en.pdf). This chapter on "pro-poor ICT-policies and practices" is worth reading and contains also numerous references.

<sup>57</sup> At <http://www.ifad.org/events/wsisis/phase1/synthesis/index.htm>

<sup>58</sup> At <http://www.ifad.org/events/wsisis/phase1/presentations/alfonso.htm>

**RS: Thank you very much for sharing these insights with us. It is true that my organization in Bangladesh has many experiences with empowerment of poor people, with increasing their economic opportunities and their human security. But somehow I always had the feeling that this was not sufficiently reflected in WSIS. You have given some explanations for this. I think an additional explanation could be that empowerment is difficult to measure. Can you expand on this?**

**CG:** When it comes to measuring the impact of ICTs on poverty reduction, we still have a wide open field of research. Because the causes of poverty are multi-dimensional, measuring impact of ICTs for poverty reduction is also a multi-dimensional task. In the preface to "Measuring Empowerment, cross-disciplinary Perspectives", a World Bank publication, Deepa Narayan writes: "If empowerment cannot be measured, it will not be taken seriously in development policy making and programming"<sup>59</sup>. Similarly, I would conclude that "if the impact of ICTs on poverty reduction cannot be measured, ICTs will not be taken seriously by bilateral and multilateral development agencies", and it will be difficult to advocate integration of ICT strategies into National Development Strategies and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

This is a crucial issue. Unfortunately, up to now, International Organizations have concentrated more on measuring the availability of the different ICTs, and their diffusion at national and regional level etc., **but not on measuring the impact of these technologies**. During the WSIS process, several International Organizations created the "Partnership for measuring ICT for Development". You find more information on this on the UNCTAD and on the ITU websites<sup>60</sup>. Up to now, the partnership concentrated on establishing a common set of core ICT-indicators, to be harmonized and agreed upon internationally, in order to create a reliable international database. There is an ongoing discussion in the partnership about how to measure impact of ICTs, and especially the impact on poverty reduction. Several representatives of bilateral Agencies asked the Partnership already in 2005 to concentrate more on impact assessments<sup>61</sup>. There are a few studies that did measure impact of ICTs on the efficiency of local business (e.g. a study by UNCTAD<sup>62</sup>), but very few data is available regarding the general impact of ICTs on poverty reduction. The Final Report of the 2008 Global Event on Measuring the

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<sup>59</sup> Narayan 2005, op.cit., page ix.

<sup>60</sup> UNCTAD website : [http://new.unctad.org/default\\_575.aspx](http://new.unctad.org/default_575.aspx) ,

ITU website: <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/partnership/>

<sup>61</sup> See e.g. the summary of meeting at ITU in 2005 at <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/ws05/doc/conclusions.pdf> , of specific interest are the paragraphs 19, 28 and 29.

<sup>62</sup> For UNCTAD see [http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/sdteecb20071ch3\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/sdteecb20071ch3_en.pdf)

Information Society, which took place in Geneva from 27 to 29 May 2008<sup>63</sup>, shows the latest discussion within the Partnership regarding measuring of impact.

One way of measuring the impact of ICTs on poverty reduction could be to measure the impact of different ICT tools and applications on empowerment, on the increase of (mostly economic) opportunities and on the increase of human security. This is not an easy task, and the most difficult task is probably to measure empowerment. Empowerment is a latent phenomenon. Its presence can only be deduced through its action or results. Hence, most observed behaviours are proxies for the underlying phenomenon<sup>64</sup>. Also, most Government statistical offices want hard and objective data, but data on empowerment will often be created by participatory research, i.e. by methods used mostly by social anthropologists, and more recently also by NGOs and bilateral development agencies (e.g. PRA-techniques). There is a history of mistrust, especially by Government representatives, regarding these kinds of self-assessment techniques, even if these techniques are increasingly used by bilateral and multilateral donors for poverty assessments. To make the task more complex, empowerment can take place at individual and at group/collective level. Empowerment has also a psychological element: It is related to self-esteem and the feeling to be able to bring change to one's own life.

It is probably easier to measure the impact of ICTs on increased (economic) opportunities for poor people (e.g. by measuring the difference of income between fishermen who use and who do not use mobile phones, or by farmers who sell their crops with or without access to market price information). There is a link between increased opportunities and empowerment. The increased opportunity (e.g. a job, or the creation of a small business) can create a sense of self-esteem which is a form of empowerment. The phone ladies of the Grameen Bank are a good example. The small businesses that were created with the mobile phones were clearly a source of personal empowerment. Microcredit schemes often have the effect of collective group empowerment; they have brought important changes to rural villages, especially in South Asia.

Measuring impact of ICTs on human security could prove to be difficult because of the questions of causality. Even if causality is a problem with all impact assessments, it could be very tricky in the field of increase of security. Better information about natural risks (e.g. about storm and hurricane previews) could lead to more risky behaviour (it could e.g. be an incentive to

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<sup>63</sup> See [http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/conferences/geneva08/Global\\_Event\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/conferences/geneva08/Global_Event_final_report.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> Deepa Narayan, op.cit. page 15

settle in very risky locations) which could in the end result in higher death tolls if a storm or if heavy rains occur. And to really assess the impact, you need to observe for a sufficiently long lapse of time. Sometimes it takes several years to prove a certain impact (see e.g. the debate about the global effect of greenhouse gases, which took several years to finally be recognized).

There is another difficulty: A mobile phone can be a tool for creating opportunities, if it is used e.g. for business purposes. It can increase security if it is used for getting weather information. If it is not used, because it is too costly, or because there is no signal coverage in the area, or for any other reasons, it has no effect. The number of mobile phone subscribers in a given population is therefore a rather insufficient way of measuring impact on poverty. In most cases, we need to assess the way the technology is used, and in many cases we need to assess the ICT-based applications like e-government and m-government applications, electronic land registers, e-procurement procedures, availability of local market data in local language on the Internet, availability of weather and storm forecasts etc. and put these tools in relation to empowerment, increase of opportunities and/or increase of security. The most difficult task in measuring impact will therefore often be to ask the right questions and to find the right indicators.

Finally, we face a problem of methodology. Deepa Narayan cites the example of conflict and its impact on livelihoods: "If national policy makers are mainly interested in the incidence of conflict across a country, a four community study that describes conflict in those four communities in detail is unlikely to provide the answers they are looking for. If, however, they are interested in the roots of the conflict, then they may find useful a four-community study, in which the four communities are randomly selected after a stratification process to represent different types of conflicts or communities"<sup>65</sup>. At least in the field of methodology, and keeping the above example in mind, **we may come to the conclusion that a few detailed case studies on the impact of ICTs on poverty reduction can provide answers to our questions, and can be used by policy makers**, especially when it comes to formulate national development strategies and PRSPs. We do not need standardized internationally comparable data on impact in order to conclude that ICTs do work for poverty reduction. I think that a few telling case studies together with a combined research effort from bilateral and multilateral Agencies<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Deepa Narayan, op.cit. page 25

<sup>66</sup> The "Building Communication Opportunities" Alliance is publishing a series of impact assessment studies in the field of Information and Communication for Development. The list of publications is at <http://www.bcoalliance.org/node/74>. A Report on the latest workshop is at <http://www.bcoalliance.org/system/files/%21+BCO+Investigation+4+-+Impact+Assessment+-+Workshop+Report.pdf>



and Universities<sup>67</sup> could help us understanding the ways how the new knowledge, communication and information environment impacts on poverty reduction. It will be very important indeed to feed back the results of this research into the policy debate.

**RS: *This could be the theme of a future interview. One last question: Do you think there will be a WSIS follow-up Summit in the near future?***

**CG:** The Tunis Agenda, in paragraph 111, requests the UN General Assembly to make an overall review of the implementation of WSIS in 2015. Governments, during negotiations, were hostile to the idea of having an automatic WSIS+5 Summit in 2010. It is true that these automatic +5 and +10 conferences, as we know them from other UN Summits, do often not bring the expected results. As we will have in any case a Millennium+15 Summit in 2015, my guess is that the review of WSIS will be linked in one way or the other to the Millennium+15 Summit. And we should not forget that there is a separate deadline for the Internet Governance Forum: Tunis Agenda paragraph 76 asks the UN Secretary-General to examine the desirability of the continuation of the Forum, in formal consultations with the Forum participants, within five years of its creation, and to make recommendation to the UN Membership in this regard. It is not impossible that a future separate UN Conference, as some sort of spin-off of WSIS, will deal with the complex theme of Internet Governance, hopefully with the same type of multi-stakeholder setting that we used in WSIS.

**RS: *Thank you very much.***

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<sup>67</sup> See e.g. the reserach of Sirpa Tenhunen at <http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/blogs/tenhunen/post8.htm> In general, The Annenberg Research Network on International Communication has a number of interesting research publications. A list is at <http://arnic.info/publications.php>

PHOTO: GUY LAWRENCE/LOMBARDODI



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PHOTO: ANSARUL HAQUE



Reza Salim is Director of the Bangladesh Friendship Education Society (BFES). Born in Bangladesh, Reza Salim started his career with Social Research at the ground level to improve people and community's health status by developing information, communication and education materials; he was later responsible for an NGO case study project which was also a comprehensive research program (Anubhav Series) financed by the Ford Foundation. He initiated rural Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) model project named "Amader Gram" which means "Our Villages" in the southwest part of Bangladesh; this project is being implemented by the BFES - an NGO serving in Bangladesh for rural education, community development and civil society engagements in policy advocacy. Through the Amader Gram Project (see [www.amadergram.org](http://www.amadergram.org)) Reza Salim is developing Knowledge Management tools appropriate for the project owners, the grassroots people of Bangladesh, that integrate ICTs as an important medium; Reza has developed the now practiced concept - KT4D (Knowledge Transfer for Development) - that includes empowerment issues for rural women. Reza Salim served for many international development organizations in the field of ICTs and empowerment. He was the South Asia Regional Coordinator (Focal Point) for the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) for the year of 2002-2004. He also served for the Bangladesh national WSIS committee as Member Secretary (Geneva 2003, Tunis 2005) which was headed by the government; he was involved in the WSIS process from the beginning and organized many consultations in Bangladesh and abroad. During WSIS, he was an active member of the Asian Civil Society group.