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The World Summit on the Information Society:
An overview of follow-up

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The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process culminated in the Tunis Summit in November 2005. We are now five months into the post-WSIS implementation phase.

Civil society, in its final statement on WSIS, expressed its commitment to continue "its involvement in the future mechanisms for policy debate, implementation and follow-up on Information Society issues" by building on the processes and structures that developed during the WSIS process[2].

But what does that mean in practice? What are the post-WSIS implementation processes, what actors are involved, when and where are they taking place and how can you get involved?

We hope the following short overview sheds some light on these questions, as well as other questions civil society actors have, as we prepare for the first intensive series of post-WSIS panels, workshops and consultations scheduled in May and June 2006.

WSIS implementation – what are the main areas of activity?

There are two areas of activity in the 'official' WSIS implementation process: the Tunis Agenda[3] (based on the Geneva Action Plan[4]) and internet governance[5]. But there are other areas of activity that do not, or may not, fall within the official implementation process. For example, activities continue around the 'Digital Solidarity Fund'. In addition, there is a multiplicity of UN agencies and other bodies involved in coordination, oversight and monitoring. Understanding how it all fits together requires quite some time and effort, which most of us do not have.

Before reading the following article, you may want to look at a chart which outlines all areas of formal WSIS related activity, as well as the actors involved in coordination, the system-wide monitoring mechanism and key dates for 2006

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[1] The three authors work for the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). Anriette Esterhuysen is the executive director, Karen Banks has coordinated APC's involvement in WSIS and Willie Currie is APC's policy programme manager.
[2]   'Much more could have been achieved':
http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download_en/WSIS-CS-summit-statement-rev1-23-12-2005-en.pdf
[3]   http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=2267|0
[4]   http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=1160|0
[5]   http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=1160|0

meetings. This chart has been compiled by Phillipe Dam of the Conference of non-governmental organisations (CONGO) and Karen Banks from APC [add URL]. It provides a one-page overview of the WSIS follow-up landscape.

The Tunis Agenda implementation: Initial consultations in February 2006

The Tunis Agenda includes the eleven 'action lines' from the Geneva Action Plan, that outline various activities to be undertaken by a range of stakeholders, with respect to issues such as 'information and communication infrastructure'; 'access to knowledge and information'; 'ICT applications'; 'cultural diversity and identity'; 'media' and 'building confidence and security in the use of ICTs'.[6]

Recommendations on how the international community should work together in the achievement of these action lines are drawn-out in the 'Tunis Agenda' [7].

Implementation of each of the eleven action lines will be coordinated by one or more UN agencies, with three of them – the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) - providing overall coordination of the entire action plan[8].

Open consultations were held in February 2006 to finalise the list of action line moderators/facilitators, to discuss the nature of the coordination process and to determine expected outputs, ways of working and logistics for implementation.[9]

During these consultations, APC proposed that in the spirit of the well-established principle of multi-stakeholder cooperation, civil society and private sector entities should be invited to join UN agencies in the role of moderation/facilitation of any specific action line. APC volunteered to co-facilitate action line 2[10] on information and communication infrastructure and action line 6[11] (enabling environment) reflecting two of APC's priority policy areas. Additionally, APC will be following action lines 3 (access to knowledge and information[12]), 4 (capacity building[13]), and 5 (building confidence and security in the use of ICTs[14]).

The Tunis Agenda implementation: Action line consultations during the Information Society Week, in May 2006

Specific action line consultation meetings will take place, between May 11 and May 18 2006 in Geneva, around eight of the eleven action lines. All meetings are open to all stakeholders and will be held at either the Palais des Nations or the ITU[15]. The Secretary eneral has designated May 17 World Information Society Day and this period of meetings is referred to as Information Society Week.

- May 11: C4: Capacity Building
- May 11: C6: Enabling Environment

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6   http://www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/index.html#alm
7   Particularly paragraphs 83-112 on Implementation and Follow-up:
http://www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=2267|0
8   http://www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/index.html#alm
9   http://www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/consultation24feb.html
10   http://www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/c2/index.html
11   http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html#c6
12   http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html#c3
13   http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html#c4
14   http://www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/c5/index.html
15   Full details of the meetings: http://www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/index.html#alm

- May 12: C8: Cultural diversity and identify, linguistic diversity and local content
- May 15: C11: International and regional cooperation
- May 15-16: C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs
- May 16: C1: The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development
- May 16: C7: e-government
- May 17: C7: e-business and e-employment
- May 18: C2: Information and communication infrastructure

What will happen at these meetings? How can civil society make the most out of them?

The action line consultation meetings will be of quite a different nature to the WSIS preparatory meetings (PrepComs) and open consultations to date. We are beyond the stage of drafting texts and declarations and have moved into the 'action' phase of the process. But for many of us, 'action' - or the implementation of activities that fall under any of the WSIS action lines - is something we've been doing for a long time.

So how can we leverage these meetings to sustain what is already a lost momentum in the international WSIS community, strengthen our networks, support our ongoing work and keep governments accountable to their commitments? This comes at a time when fewer and fewer groups have the resources to attend Geneva-based meetings and undoubtedly, an increasing wariness about the added value of yet another series of WSIS meetings.

In its preparation for these meetings, APC is reflecting on some of the questions which have emerged from our research initiative 'Evaluating civil society and developing country participation in the second phase of the WSIS'. The research is being coordinated by Professor David Souter and the final report will be released towards the end of May 2006. Here is a snapshot of some of the questions:

1. How can the participation of different stakeholders in the action line process be engaged? Will decisions taken during the May meetings - by relatively small groups and without wider consultation - enable sufficiently diverse participation to build lasting action line teams?

2. What is the purpose of the action line follow-up process? Is it intended to be:

- proactive - for example, by coordinating initiatives across agencies and stakeholder communities;
- analytical - for example, by addressing a small number of specific issues in detail, rather then what the IGF stands for;
- evaluative - for example, by monitoring activity related to WSIS outcome documents;
- informative - for example, by facilitating exchange of information between participants?

3. How should different action lines be coordinated? Is it possible to cluster some of the action lines into logical groupings?

4. Who should facilitate the action lines? If these are to be multi-stakeholder initiatives, then they need involvement at the centre from more than just the UN

International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) to which responsibility was allocated during WSIS and in February in Geneva.

5. What should the action lines discuss? The answer to this question depends on the nature of the meetings, as described in question 2 above. But irrespective of the nature of the meetings - whether they be pro-active, analytical, evaluative, informative, or a mix of these - a successful outcome will depend largely on the possibility of groups coming together. These would need to agree to do substantive work on specific, concrete activities, rather than attempt to deal with a wide-ranging agenda and long wish list based on the complete WSIS agenda.

6. How should these action lines function? Most follow-up work will have, by necessity, to be carried out online. There is a limit to how many face-to-face meetings can be organised, not mentioning that only a very few groups have the time or money on their hand. However, if groups self-organise along the lines described in question 5 above, they may be in a position to 'tailor' the working methods to the groups' needs, combining online and face-to-face meetings as appropriate.

7. How and to whom should they report?

8. How long should they last? Should they be open-ended or have a fixed term?

APC will be using these meetings to share information about the work we are doing in relation to our priority action lines (C2, C3, C4 and C6). We will be actively seeking interest and engagement from all stakeholders in working with us in the implementation of our work on the ground.

We will be 'testing the water' so to speak, in assessing the seriousness with which stakeholders, including facilitators and moderators, are committed to achieving the actions as outlined in the Geneva Action Plan.

No doubt, other organisations will be sharing information about their ongoing work. Many organisations have been offering comments and suggestions about priority activities in relation to, for example, C8 (cultural and linguistic diversity) on the UNESCO open platform[16].

The meetings will also provide an opportunity for those civil society organisations (CSOs) that can attend, to meet and strategise more generally for longer-term engagement. To this end, CONGO is willing to organise daily consultations for CSOs throughout the period – an opportunity that should not be missed.

It is too early to say what may emerge beyond this first set of consultation meetings. If there is sufficient interest from CSOs to form loose coalitions or networks, with one another and with other stakeholders around specific action lines, or even specific activities within action lines, the meetings may provide a platform to re-energise the networks working both within, and beyond, the WSIS structures.

Internet governance

One of the most concrete outcomes of the WSIS process (at least to date) was agreements by governments that the Secretary General convene an Internet

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[16]   http://www.unesco.org/webworld/wsis/consultation/index.php/en/entry/4/

Governance Forum - and that this forum have an initial mandate of five years, after which time, its mandate should be reviewed.

Initial consultations on the convening of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) were held in February 2006. Nitin Desai and Markus Kummer, respectively chair and coordinator of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), chaired the consultations.

The IGF secretariat website notes of the initial meeting[17]:

"About 300 participants representing all stakeholder groups attended the meeting. The participants addressed a wide variety of issues, such as the IGF's scope of work and substantive priorities as well as aspects related to its structure and functioning. The aim of the consultations was to develop a common understanding among all stakeholders on the nature and character of the IGF."

The chair ended the meeting asking for further contributions (via online means) on two issues that remained unresolved during the session:

- What three issues the IGF should address during its inaugural meeting.
- What the nature of the support group working with the secretariat in convening the meeting would be.

The issues around internet governance

That these two questions remained unresolved during the meeting is not surprising. Questions about the breadth of scope, authority and participation in the IGF (amongst others) were apparent in their contentiousness during the final stages of the WSIS process. In summary, governments who are largely comfortable with the status quo in relation to internet governance, pushed, both within WSIS, and during the consultations earlier this year, for a narrow issue scope for the IGF, wishing to keep the agenda 'uncontroversial' and issues which are considered contentious, off the agenda.

A common reasoning behind keeping 'uncontroversial' issues off the agenda is that of ensuring 'success' for the first IGF, which would in turn guarantee the longevity of the IGF. However, as pointed out by civil society during the consultation, one person's definition of 'success' could be another's for failure, with the same logic applied to one's definition of 'controversial'.

Conversely, those governments and other stakeholders (including civil society at large) who are not comfortable with current internet governance mechanisms advocated that it was precisely these 'controversial issues' which the IGF should address, and address as a matter of priority. Civil society's position, supported by APC in this respect, is that any internet governance issue which needs to be addressed by the international community, could and should be tabled for the IGF agenda.

Secondly, some feel, and APC is amongst them, that the IGF should not restrict its agenda to addressing specific issues (such as 'spam', 'cybercrime' or multilingualism') in isolation from an overarching priority to address - in a cross-cutting holistic manner - fundamental questions of a development orientation to internet governance, informed by a gender perspective, under-pinned by a rights-based approach to all aspects of its work.

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[17]   http://www.intgovforum.org/meeting.htm

Some 35 contributions have been received by the IGF on the 'issue' question to date[18]. Almost all make recommendations based around the 'specific issue' agenda (such as spam, network stability and reliability, DNS management, cybercrime and multilingualism). It is encouraging to see quite a few recommendations seeking to address freedom of expression, privacy rights and consumer protection. However, there are very few who advocate for a more holistic approach to agenda setting.

APC's contribution calls for the IGF to adopt, from the outset, a 'development agenda for internet governance' which is not limited to capacity building within the status quo, or focussing on any specific issue, but advocates that the IGF addresses every issue it deals with, from a development perspective[19].

Shaping the agenda for the IGF, based on all contributions to date, will be the work of the 'multi-stakeholder advisory group' -referred to as the 'MAG'. The nature of this group and the selection of its members is the second issue around which consultations have been conducted.

The Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group (MAG)

The consultations in Geneva and interim online processes have resulted in the decision by the Secretary General to set up a multi-stakeholder advisory group to assist him in the task of convening the IGF.

The IGF website notes:

"The Group will consist of about forty members, representing governments, private sector and civil society and include members of the academic and technical communities. The members of the group will be chosen in their personal capacity."

Civil society has been asked to submit a list of ten to fifteen candidates for consideration. There has been some 'behind-the-scenes' talk, that there is still a possibility that the group may not end up being an equal multi-stakeholder entity. That is, there is still some resistance to having parity amongst government, private sector and civil society. This is an issue civil society must be vigilant around. As to accept a multi-stakeholder advisory group for the IGF that is not one of true 'equals at the table' would symbolise a significant step back in the precedents established by the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) process.

All stakeholders were invited to submit recommendations for the advisory group to the IGF secretariat by April 18.

The WSIS Civil Society internet governance caucus formed a nomination committee to select ten to fifteen candidates for this purpose. Organisations, (including APC) and individuals submitted nomination statements for potential candidates they felt would bring the skills, expertise and experience needed for the IGF to convene a 'successful' inaugural forum.

The final list of fifteen candidates, as selected by the civil society nomination committee, has been submitted to the IGF secretariat, which will announce the

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18   http://www.intgovforum.org/contributions_sa.htm
19   http://www.intgovforum.org/contributions/APC_Issues_IGF.pdf

final MAG in the coming weeks. Both the list, and the reflection on the civil society nomination process can be viewed on the wsis-cs.org website[20].

There will be another round of open consultations on the IGF on May 19, in Geneva. The advisory group that will have been selected by this time, will be listening to the contributions of all stakeholders. They will then meet for the first time on May 22-23 in their capacity of the MAG.

Council for Science and Technology for Development and Global Alliance for ICTD

One of the big questions marks hanging over the WSIS implementation process is how ongoing work will be integrated into the larger UN family system. That is, how reporting, monitoring and evaluation will find their way into the UN's Economic and Social Council annual assembly. The current proposal suggests a reformed CSTD - Council for Science and Technology for Development - to provide this overarching system-wide role. We are nonetheless not holding our breath just yet.

Although an important agency, the speed with which it has, and will be able to deal with the internal systemic change required to accommodate WSIS implementation and follow-up, does not inspire great confidence. However, the first opportunity to input into this process is an open consultation on May 18, during the CSTD's annual general meeting in Geneva, which spans from May 15 to 19.

See the CSTD webiste for more details:
http://stdev.unctad.org/unsystem/cstd/9session.html

And if there aren't quite enough meetings to keep us busy in Geneva this May, open consultations on the future of the 'Global Alliance for ICTD' will take place on May 15.

The Global Alliance for ICTD emerged from the evolution of the UNICT Task Force and was approved by the UN Secretary General for ongoing operations in April 2006. Their revamped mission will be to integrate ICTs into "development activities of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)." They plan to launch the new alliance in June 2006, in Malaysia. Global Alliance: http://www.unicttaskforce.org/

WSIS implementation at the regional and national levels

The Tunis Agenda also deals with the implementation of WSIS at regional and national levels in paragraphs 100 and 101. At the national level, governments are encouraged to develop e-strategies with the participation of all stakeholders in a national implementation mechanism. At the regional level, the UN Regional Commissions are asked to take the lead.

APC's involvement in ICT policy advocacy regionally and locally

Besides engaging with ICT policy at the global level through WSIS, APC's ICT policy and advocacy work also takes place at regional and national levels – and in a variety of ways. It includes awareness raising, training and capacity building, lobbying and advocacy.The work often involves collaboration with a range of stakeholders from civil society, the local media and local business and is broadly

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[20] http://www.wsis-cs.org/index.html

focussed around increasing civil society participation in and influence of, local ICT policy processes.

In Africa, our work through the DFID funded 'Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa' (CATIA) initiative, is supporting 'single issue' campaigns designed to raise awareness and influence national level ICT policies - in Kenya (promoting access to ICTs within the national ICT policy and legislation), Ethiopia[21] (promoting the use of Free and open source software), Senegal (raising awareness of ICT policy within the media), Uganda (engendering national ICT policy), Nigeria (advocating for community radio) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (developing a national backbone network).

We are working with a coalition of partners to ensure people in East Africa have access to the East Africa Submarine System (EASSy) on an affordable basis. The goal is also to reduce the high costs of international bandwidth on the continent, which are a major obstacle to its social and economic development[22].

In South Asia, we are working with partners in Bangladesh (broadband policy), India (open access to digital content for development) and Pakistan (community radio and community networks). APC recently convened a consultative meeting of over 30 organisations from South Asia in Dhaka, Bangladesh to explore how best to influence ICT policies and advance advocacy in the sub-region[23].

In Latin America and the Caribbean, we are focussing on the eLAC2007 Action Plan at the regional level as well as supporting national capacity building and advocacy in Bolivia, Ecuador and Jamaica.[24]

APC is particularly concerned with making links between the global, regional and local spaces of ICT policy advocacy. In this scope, APC is targeting two broad themes: open access and; a rights-based & development approach to internet governance.

By open access we understand 'opening' of access in five interlinked dimensions:

(1) Access to knowledge
This includes access to knowledge not just at the level of retrieving and using information, but also at the level of producing and sharing knowledge. It covers content and capacity.

(2) Access to innovation
This includes promotion of open standards in the information and communication sector, in hardware and in software. It includes challenging restrictions on innovating and on the sharing of innovation imposed by copyright and patents. It includes the promotion of free and open source software, and alternative approaches to licensing applications and content.

(3) Access to infrastructure and to tools
This includes access to the internet, to sufficient bandwidth, and to the tools and devices needed to access and share ideas and information on the internet.

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[21]   http://www.efossnet.org/
[22]   http://www.fibreforafrica.net/
[23]   http://www.apcasiaictpolicy.net/
[24] In partnership with the International Institute for Communications and Development (IICD).

(4) Access to decision-making processes
Making policy and other decision making more inclusive of diverse and dissenting views is a prerequisite to ensuring that open access approaches become the norm in our societies.

(5) Access to rights and freedoms
For people and communities to make effective use of having more open access to tools, content, and decision making, they need to be able to operate in a context where basic freedom of information, association and expression is assured.

With regard to internet governance, the increasing threats to open use of the internet by unscrupulous governments is a key concern affecting human rights, as is the lack of access to the internet in developing countries. Developing countries have only 5% internet penetration, largely on dial-up services, while developed countries have 46% access to the internet, largely on broadband.

It is in this context that APC is advocating for an 'Open Access' approach to underpin all WSIS follow up and implementation activities.

Post Tunis mechanisms allowing for NGO inputs

GENEVA SUMMIT 10-12 December 2003
TUNIS SUMMIT 16-18 November 2005

New financing mechanism — Outside of the WSIS process

Digital Solidarity Fund - DSF

Inaugurated in Geneva on 14 March 2005, outside of the WSIS process.

WSIS welcomed the DSF as "an innovative financial mechanism" (§ 28, Tunis Agenda).

Initiated in the aftermath of the Geneva Summit on an initiative by the City of Geneva and the President of Senegal, it allows the voluntary commitment of public authorities, including local authorities, and private entities for with the view to transform the digital divide into digital opportunities.

Partnerships with civil society entities.

www.dsf-fsn.org

Multi-stakeholder policy dialogue on Internet Governance

Internet Governance Forum IGF

WSIS invited the UN Secretary General to convene the IGF for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue and clarified its mandate, structure and functions (§ 67 and 72 to 79, Tunis Agenda).

Consultation process 2006:
16-17 February: Open consultation sin Geneva.
28 February: End of on-line consultations on a restricted advisory group.
31 March: Conclusion of on-line consultations on issues to be discussed.
18 April: Deadline for submissions for Multi-Stakeholder advisory Group
19 May: Open Consultations in Geneva
22-23 May: IGF advisory Group meeting
29 Oct-Nov: Inaugiral IGF, Athens, Greece

www.intgovforum.org
www.igfgreece2006.gr

Implementation at the international level

Multistakeholder Implementation process

WSIS provided that multi-stakeholder implementation at the international level would be moderated/facilitated by UN agencies when appropriate, taking into account the themes and action lines in the Geneva Plan of Action (§ 108 to 110).

Action line meetings, Geneva::
12 May: C4, Capacity Building; C6 Enabling environment
12 May: C8, Cultural Diversity and Identity
15 May: C1, ICTs for development; C7, e-government; C11, regional and international cooperation
15-16 May: C5, Information security
17 May: C7, e-business and e-employment
18 May: C2, infrastructure

www.itu.int/wsis/implementatio

Systemwide follow-up to WSIS

Commission on Science and Technology for Development

WSIS requested ECOSOC to review the CSTD to oversee the follow-up to WSIS in a multi-stakeholder approach (§ 105).

Consultation process 2006:
13 February: Informal meeting on strengthening the CSTD.
11 or 12 May: CSDT informal consultation on WSIS followup
18 May: CSTD open panel

Reform process:
15-19 May 2006: IX° session of the CTSD (Geneva).
July 2006: ECOSOC review of CSTD mandate and composition.

stdev.unctad.om

UN multi stakeholder initiative — Outside of the WSIS process

UN ICT Task Force

Established at the request of ECOSOC in March 2001, the ICTTF is aimed at supporting at the global level the efforts to bridge the digital divide and ICT for development. Finalized in Tunis in Nov. 2005
www.unicttf.org

Global Alliance for ICT and Development

This initiative to bring together all stakeholders involved in ICT policies for development to ensure a truly effective multi-stakeholder collaboration is intended to replace the UN ICT TF at the end of its mandate.

Consultations took place throughout 2005, including in Tunis during the WSIS Phase II, and are still on-going.

The launch of the Global Alliance is expected to take place in mid-2006.

www.unicttf.org