



# THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS) PROCESS AND ISSUES DEBATED

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## Introduction

The formal preparation for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), a global discussion process sponsored by the United Nations Organization Secretariat, began in mid-2002. Said process is directed toward developing a global framework to face the challenges of the so-called information society (IS). In this sense, its purpose is to reach a common understanding, secure political commitments and define concrete actions and mechanisms on the subject.

In the words of UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, the WSIS offers *“a unique opportunity for all key players to develop a shared vision of ways to bridge the digital divide and create a truly global information society. It will be an opportunity to develop specific solutions and tools and adopt a realistic and viable plan of action.”*<sup>2</sup>

The WSIS, which unlike other Summits sponsored by the United Nations takes place in two phases (Geneva 2003 and Tunisia 2005), includes the private sector as a key actor for the first time and seeks to reflect the interests of the different actors convened for the process. Another peculiarity is that it is organized by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), a technical organization, despite the fact that the issues dealt with have deep social, cultural, economic and political implications.

This article offers a general description of the WSIS as an introduction to help understand the process. Thus, it emphasizes and highlights some background aspects of the celebration of the Summit, the main actors involved, the results obtained, the preparatory process and the authorities that participated in the first phase. The second phase is introduced and commented upon. Then, it summarizes the key issues that were formally raised during the first phase of the Summit. Finally, some ideas for an evaluation of the process and suggestions for the future are presented.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wsis-online.net/message-annan>

## Background

In 1998, during the ITU's Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Seattle, the celebration of a summit on the information society was suggested. In 1999, following a consultative process with other organizations and specialized United Nations agencies, and their expression of interest in collaborating in the WSIS, the decision to hold the meeting under the UN General Secretariat sponsorship was made, although the ITU would be in charge of the process' administrative and organizational management. The ITU Council decided in 2001 to hold the Summit in two phases. That same year, the United Nations General Assembly, with Resolution 56/183<sup>3</sup>, approved the framework for the Summit and recommended that an Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee be responsible for defining the program, the methods of participation for the different actors and the proposal for the creation of the Declaration of Principles and the Action Plan.

Besides this formal background, there are factors of a different nature that have influence the celebration of the WSIS. On one hand, there is the globalization process and the importance that information communication technologies (ICT) have acquired in the global market. This importance lies, for the most part, in the convergence of different areas of social and economic life. What used to be four separate industries that offered independent goods (computer science, communications, electronic consumerism and content) are now part of the same field, the strongest and most influential at the moment, which crucially determines the information flow and communicative process: the information and communication industry.

The impact this phenomenon has on different spheres in social life means that, particularly in least developed and developing countries, existing poverty is worsened, and social rifts are exacerbated and widened, including the so-called digital divide, which is a mere reflection and extension of existing structural gaps.

On the other hand, there is a lack of clarity on vital factors such as internet governance and an absence of adequate regulatory and political frameworks to attend to the majority of the issues related to the information society and ICT.

In addition, it is important to return to the debates that arose during the past decades regarding the information society, on one hand, and communication, on the other. Seán Ó Siochrú maintains that these debates, which have been determined by the UNESCO's MacBride Report, intersect at the WSIS both in official and unofficial fora.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Resolution 56/183 encourages "all competent United Nations organisms, particularly the United Nations Special Group on ICT to make contributions. It encourages other intergovernmental and, specially, international and regional institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector, to actively participate in the Summit's intergovernmental preparatory process and the Summit itself." <http://www.itu.int/wsis/basic/about.html>

<sup>4</sup> For more on this, see "Will the Real WSIS Please Stand-up?", Seán Ó Siochrú. <http://www.crisinfo.org/content/view/full/247/>

A final factor is the acknowledgment by various social actors of the undeniable potential of ICT as tools for development. In this context, the existence of initiatives involving these technologies in the field of development is worth mentioning. Two of these with the most global importance are the Digital Opportunity Task (DOT) Force<sup>5</sup> and the United Nations ICT Task Force.<sup>6</sup>

## The Stakeholders

The main actors convened for the WSIS process are governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations family, international organizations and media. This article offers a brief description of the three main WSIS actors:

1. The governments<sup>7</sup> are considered fundamental actors in ensuring that the benefits and advantages of the information society reach everyone through the development of appropriate policies.
2. The private sector<sup>8</sup> is called on to offer viable economic models that allow for the development of the information society, to generate material and infrastructural conditions that facilitate universal access to information communication technologies, stimulate economic growth, encourage association agreements, support the transference of technology, and generate work opportunities, among other functions.
3. Civil society<sup>9</sup> is convened with the aim of introducing elements of analysis on the social, cultural and political consequences and impact of the development of the information society, and to make contributions from a democratic perspective.

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<sup>5</sup> DOT Force is a G8 country initiative (Canada, United States, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and now Russia). It was created after the Okinawa Summit (2000), and during a year, some government members, commercial entities and civil society worked to develop a proposal on the key elements that should be incorporated into ICT policy. <http://www.dotforce.org/>

<sup>6</sup>The UN ICT Task Force is an initiative of United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan and established by ECOSOC in 2001. It is oriented toward coordinating different ICT for development initiatives and global projects and makes recommendations at the ICT policy level. It situates ICT for development within the Millennium Development Goals Declaration, which aims to reduce poverty by 50% by 2015. <http://www.unicttaskforce.org/>

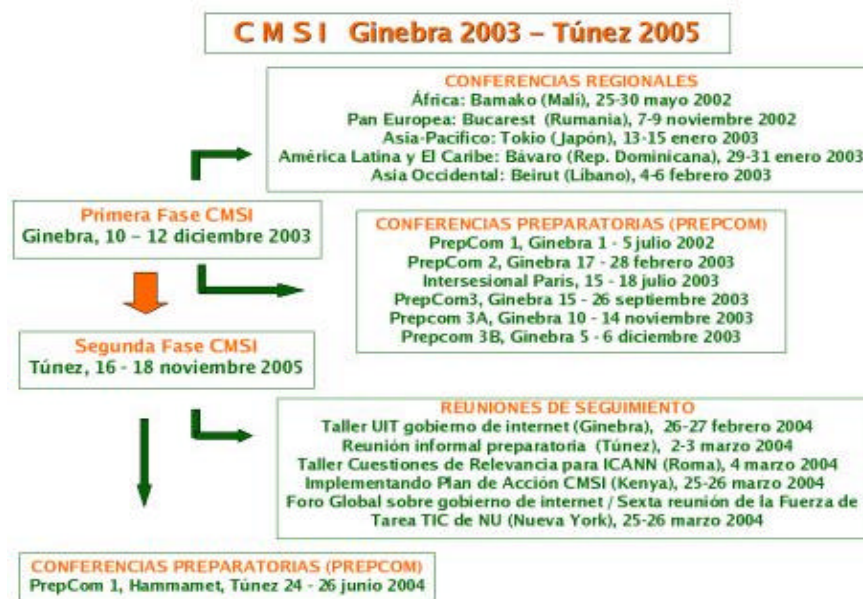
<sup>7</sup>Represented by the delegations of the 191 United Nations member states. The delegations can be made up of ministerial civil servants, telecommunications regulatory bodies and other related departments. It can also include private sector and civil society representatives that have received official accreditation.

<sup>8</sup>Represented at the Summit by the Commercial Participant Coordination Committee, which facilitates and coordinates business sector participation. This sector also includes ITU member businesses and industries. [http://iccwbo.org/home/e\\_business/wsisis.asp](http://iccwbo.org/home/e_business/wsisis.asp)

<sup>9</sup>Within the Summit process, civil society encompasses a multiplicity of groups, movements, organizations and networks with different experiences and visions on the issues that are discussed at the WSIS, which are integrated in the Civil Society Division. <http://www.geneva2003.org/wsisis/indexa03.htm>. NGOs, members of academia, unions, local governments, educators, researchers, volunteers, activists in different areas, indigenous peoples and philanthropic groups, among others.. <http://www.wsisis-cs.org>

It is important to mention that the private sector and civil society have observer status in the official process, and that in practice it was not possible to determine the proposed participation plan, under equal conditions, of the three main actors convened. Civil society faced serious limitations and difficulties to make its voice heard and integrate their visions and contributions in the official Summit documents.

## The Process



## Geneva 2003

The first phase of the WSIS involved, as is common at United Nations Summits, a preparatory process<sup>10</sup> that included a series of world conferences of the Preparatory Committee (PrepComs), ministerial regional conferences and informal sessions, as the image illustrates. This led to the high level event in Geneva, with the sponsorship of the Swiss Government. The Summit was

<sup>10</sup>PrepCom1 was directed toward defining the rules of participation and the WSIS procedures, as well as designing an initial draft of the issues to be discussed. PrepCom2 had the objective of drafting the Declaration and Action Plan. PrepCom3 intended to finalize the documents and define the procedural rules for the Geneva Summit. In light of the fact that this was not achieved, an informal reunion and two additional preparatory conferences (PrepCom3A and Prepcom3B) with the intent of refining and concluding the documents. The Regional Preparatory Conferences were directed toward discussing the visions, needs and particular priorities that were expressed in each regional declaration. Supposedly, the regional declarations were meant to contribute to the final WSIS declaration. The result shows that little of the substantial content and proposals from the regions was included in the document that was approved in December 2003 in Geneva.

accompanied by parallel and alternative events (ICT4D<sup>11</sup>, a World Forum on Communication Rights<sup>12</sup>, a World Media Forum<sup>13</sup> and an alternative event, We Seize<sup>14</sup>, among others.

## Tunisia 2005

The second phase has been controversial, and has given rise to doubts and fears regarding the possible participatory restrictions that might exist for the different sectors involved.<sup>15</sup> This stage of the process has yet to be clearly defined. Furthermore, until the beginning of February of this year, neither the governments nor the ITU itself were totally clear on the path to Tunisia.<sup>16</sup> Following a meeting held by the Summit group at the ITU at the end of February 2004, the role of this body has been better established.<sup>17</sup>

In February 2004, a series of meetings took place in Geneva to debate the future of the Summit.<sup>18</sup> The following general proposals for the Tunisia phase arose within this context.

- It should focus on the development of a Charter that is independent of the existing Declaration and Action Plan.
- It should have a more thematic and regional perspective.
- It can be considered an implementation conference.

None of these proposals has significant support yet.

Between the end of February and April 2004, various meetings were held of the ITU's working groups and of the provisional Summit bureau. Some of the most important of these are explained in the following paragraphs.

The government of Tunisia, in coordination with the ITU, convened an informal brainstorming meeting that took place in this country on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of March,

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<sup>11</sup><http://www.ict-4d.org/>

<sup>12</sup><http://www.communicationrights.org/>

<sup>13</sup><http://www.wemfmedia.org/es/what.html>

<sup>14</sup><http://www.geneva03.org/>

<sup>15</sup>The Tunisian government has been asked what policy will encompass the completion of the Summit and its preparatory process. Doubts and fears that have been presented, especially by civil society, are founded on the government's human rights and freedom of speech violations, as well as obstacles for the access into the country of humanitarian activist organizations.

<sup>16</sup>The ITU, for a variety of reasons, among them its financial crisis and its mandate as a technical entity, requested that the UN Secretariat make sure that other UN organisms contribute to the organization and financing of the Summit. The ITU's position is documented in the ITU paper "ITU Role in Preparing for the Tunis phase of the WSIS", available at [http://www.itu.int/council/wsis/wsis\\_WG.html](http://www.itu.int/council/wsis/wsis_WG.html)

<sup>17</sup>The WSIS group at the ITU, formed by member states and sectors, met on the 25th of February and, among other things, evaluated the role that the ITU was to play in the second phase. The participants expressed their desire for the ITU to assume a leadership role in the implementation of the Tunisia phase.

<sup>18</sup> It is worth mentioning that the on-site participation at these meetings was significantly low. It is expected that the same will occur with the meetings in Tunisia, particularly insofar as the participation of organizations and members of civil society are concerned. For the most part, the Swiss government financed the civil society activity during the first phase, but once concluded, the presence of said actors is not guaranteed and depends on the resources allocated for it. Apparently, the government of this country is not in a position to fund the Summit. It is important to mention that at the beginning of April, the ITU General Secretariat launched a fundraising campaign to support the Tunisia preparatory process.

during which advances were made in discussions on the definition of participatory structures and facilitation mechanisms.

Additionally, the Tunisian government proposed that the second phase should take place under the theme of "Partnership for sustainable development based on solidarity." It is expected that the first preparatory conference will offer the opportunity to define the issues mentioned.<sup>19</sup> For the time being, it is said that the participatory structures of the first phase<sup>20</sup> will be adopted and operative during the second phase. However, this is yet to be seen. The different actors, fundamentally civil society, expect that clear mechanisms will be determined to assure its participation.

On March 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> the Global Governance Forum of the United Nations ICT Task Force took place in New York. The event convened relevant actors, leaders and individuals interested in the subject from the private sector, civil society and the UN member states. *"As a space for actors concerned with internet governance to speak out the event was a great success. As a forum for the kind of in-depth discussion of the issues needed to reach consensus on how to disaggregate the various areas of policy and regulation that is loosely grouped under 'internet governance' the Global Forum did not make great strides. It clearly acknowledged that there are fundamental concerns around the accountability and legitimacy of current internet governance structures, but at the same time the overall tone of the event was "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". But not everyone agrees on what is broken, nor on what fixing should be involved.."*<sup>21</sup>

## Process Results

The adoption of the Declaration of Principles and an Action Plan by part of the UN member states was the main result expected of the first phase of the Summit (Geneva 2003). The second phase has begun and, despite the lack of clear guidelines up until now about its focus, it is known that Tunisia 2005 will tackle themes on development and the evaluation of advances made in the

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<sup>19</sup>The WSIS Preparatory Committee's provisional bureau decided, during the informal meeting that was held March 31, 2004, that the first preparatory conference would be in Tunisia between the 24 and 26th of June of this year. It has been confirmed that one of the main objectives is the definition of the participatory structures and mechanisms as well as the expected outcome of the Tunisia phase.

<sup>20</sup>The participatory structure for the Summit actors for the first phase can be summarized in the following manner:

- The main decision-making bodies for governments and civil society are their respective plenaries.
- The working and content development body is Subcommittee 2 for the governments and the Content and Themes Group for Civil Society.
- The body for discussion and defining rules and procedure is Subcommittee 1 or (Governmental Bureau) for the governments and the Civil Society Bureau. The latter is made up of 22 families (caucus y and regional and thematic working groups).

<sup>21</sup>Report on the Global Internet Governance Forum elaborated by Anriette Esterhuysen , executive director of APC and member of the United Nations ICT Task Force (UNICTTF), and by Karen Banks, APC negotiation and network coordinator. APC coordinates the UNICTTF working group on ICT policy. The complete report can be read, in English at: <http://www.apc.org/english/news/index.shtml?x=18720>

implementation of the Geneva 2003 Action Plan. Basically, the themes that were left pending are those of internet governance and financing for the distribution of ICT, with the purpose of decreasing the digital divide (particularly, the African proposal on the Digital Solidarity Fund)

### **Themes discussed in the first phase**

The ITU Plenipotentiary Conference that took place in Morocco in 2002 defined a general framework with three axes as starting points for the identification of issues.

- Promote access to ICT for all
- Apply ICTs as tools for economic and social development to reach the Millennium Development Objectives.
- Trust and confidence building in the use of ICT

The preparatory meetings defined the specific issues that the governments discussed at the Summit and that constitute the content of official documents.

From the point of view of civil society, there are relevant themes that remained out of the government's discussion agenda under the premise that they had to be debated and discussed in other arenas. Such is the case of subjects like intellectual property, the exchange of goods and services, the opening of markets and regional free trade agreements. The following table summarizes the most relevant elements from the official perspective, and civil society's position in response to it.



<b>Themes</b>	<b>Official perspective<sup>22</sup></b>	<b>Civil society perspective<sup>23</sup></b>
The role of governments and interested parties in the promotion of ICTs for development.	Highlights the importance of responsibility sharing and cooperation among the interested parties.	Sustains that the participation of people as citizens, of their organizations and communities, of the different social and linguistic groups, cultures and peoples, rural and urban populations, in the decision-making process and other governmental policy definition methods, with no exception or exclusion, is essential for the construction of equal information societies.
Information and Communication infrastructure: basic pillar of an information society for all.	Emphasizes the need to develop adequate ICT infrastructure for the different peculiarities, fomenting private investment within a framework of fair competition. The emphasis lies on the development of ICT infrastructure in free market conditions.	Highlights that the expansion of information infrastructures must be based on principles of equality and association, and follow rules of fair competition and regulation at national and international levels. Access, infrastructure, and public training integration, as well as the generation of local content within the framework of social networks and public or private policies, are a fundamental starting point for the development of equal and integrating information societies. The implementation and expansion of a (tele) communications and access infrastructure will demand financial investments that are congruent with the enormous needs that exist in this field.
Access to information and knowledge	Recognizes the importance of placing information in the public domain and that promoting access to information and knowledge implies the dissemination of different computational models (proprietary software, free and open source software) It mentions open access to scientific and technical information.	Affirms that human knowledge is the heritage of all humanity and the reserve from which new knowledge is born. The access to information and communication media, insofar as they are a public and global good, must be participative, universal, inclusive and democratic. A rich public domain is essential. It maintains that free software is an essential component for information societies that generate autonomous, sustainable and inclusive capacities.

<sup>22</sup>Taken from the Declaration of Principles. Although this document makes important mentions of human rights, gender equality, and the value of free software, among others, the Action Plan is plagued with generalizations and makes no concrete proposals (except the creation of two working groups: one on internet governance, and the other on financing to bridge the digital divide, as well as the occasional follow-up proposal). Moreover, the Action Plan contradicts some of the good intentions of the Declaration, with its heavy focus on connectivity and infrastructure.

<sup>23</sup>Taken from the Civil Society WSIS Declaration "Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs", [http://www.apc.org/apps/img\\_upload/5ba65079e0c45cd29dfdb3e618dda731/WSISCSDec250204en.rtf](http://www.apc.org/apps/img_upload/5ba65079e0c45cd29dfdb3e618dda731/WSISCSDec250204en.rtf), and the "Civil Society Essential Benchmarks for WSIS"

[http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download\\_en/CS-Essential-Benchmarks-for-WSIS-14-11-03-final.rtf](http://www.worldsummit2003.de/download_en/CS-Essential-Benchmarks-for-WSIS-14-11-03-final.rtf)

Themes	Official perspective <sup>22</sup>	Civil society perspective <sup>23</sup>
Capacity building	Deals with the issue of capacity building related to ICTs, based on universal literacy and primary education. It presents the need to establish the conditions required for constant learning and the diversification of the teaching of ICT applications in different areas of social and economic life. It also speaks of the inclusion of excluded groups in the capacity building process.	Notes that literacy, education and investigation are fundamental and interrelated components. The creation and acquisition of knowledge must be a participative, collective, and sustainable process. It stresses the importance of combining new and traditional resources and methods. It advocates the acknowledgment of the right to education as key for citizen participation. Human capacity creation initiatives must stimulate the general desire to learn and respond to specific and special needs.
Enabling environment (continued)		<p>The global coordination of internet resources can not be based on an intergovernmental model that does not consider the multiple interests involved. As soon as conditions to attain system stability and firm management can be guaranteed, the control of inherent global resources, such as the root server system, should be transferred to a global entity representative of a variety of interests.</p> <p>ICT innovation should keep with international technical standards for hardware, software and processes in an open, freely applicable way, that is public documented inter-operative, non-discriminatory and according to demand.</p>
Use of ICT: advantages in all facets of life	An open acknowledgment of the potential of ICT to combat and reduce poverty, promote social and economic development, the protection of the environment and natural resource management. It also emphasizes access to, ability to pay for and adaptability of ICT applications.	<p>Affirms that ICT should be designed and adopted according to sustainable principles so that its potential can be used to improve the life conditions of the majority and preserve the environment. Communities should be able to participate directly in the development and implementation of ICT-based solutions for their problems.</p> <p>Maintains that the adoption of conscious measures directed toward defined objectives is necessary to guarantee that the expansion of new ICTs is not done with the aim of perpetuating the negative tendencies of economic globalization and the monopolization of the markets. Development and ICT applications must be directed toward promoting the social, economic, and cultural progress of the peoples of the world and contribute to transform the development paradigm.</p>

Themes	Official perspective <sup>22</sup>	<i>Civil society perspective</i> <sup>23</sup>
Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content.	Affirms that an essential pillar of the information society is respect for cultural, linguistic and religious identities and diversity. It mentions the importance of the creation of local content to promote development and the preservation of cultural heritage via appropriate means, including digital ones.	Emphasizes cultural and linguistic diversity as fundamental features of people-centered information and communication societies. ICTs, including traditional media, have a particularly important role in the preservation and promotion of the cultures and languages of the world.
Mass Media	The principles of freedom of press and opinion are reaffirmed. It advocates the ethical and responsible use of information and recognizes the role of traditional media. It presents, contradictorily, the need to promote diverse proprietary models in the media according to existing national legislation and international conventions (the existence of discriminatory legal frameworks that inhibit the creation of community media and hinder their management and development must be born in mind).	Underscores the importance of working so that communities can use media and information communication technologies, both old and new, to communicate. It affirms that efforts to promote pluralistic and diverse media ownership should be encouraged to avoid excessive concentrations. It emphasizes the crucial role that community media play in facilitating widespread access and participation in the information society, especially in the most impoverished and marginalized communities. It expresses the need for states to support and promote community media with non-discriminatory and favorable legal frameworks.

Themes	Official perspective <sup>22</sup>	<i>Civil society perspective</i> <sup>23</sup>
Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society	Enumerates the values that should govern the IS: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature. It maintains that fundamental human rights should be respected in the use of ICTs and that preventive measures and legal actions should be taken to avoid the misuse of ICTs and the generation of actions that incite violence, hate, racial discrimination, xenophobia, intolerance, child abuse, and the trafficking of persons.	Accentuates the importance of the principles contained in internationally agreed conventions, declarations and charters as a whole, as a basic value for the development of information societies. It notes that equal, fair and open access to knowledge and information resources should constitute a fundamental principle in these societies. It makes reference to the importance of transparent and responsible governments, ethical business and accounting practices in communication sector companies and the ethical behavior of communication media. It encourages the adoption of ethical norms and codes and mechanisms to supervise their application. It emphasizes the respect for diversity as a central criterion when establishing principles and mechanisms for the resolution of conflict that arise in information societies. Likewise, it highlights principles such as co-operation, equity, honesty, integrity, respect and solidarity as a premise for interaction between cultures and the promotion of a fruitful dialogue among civilizations that contributes to world peace.

Themes	Official perspective <sup>22</sup>	Civil society perspective <sup>23</sup>
International and Regional Cooperation	Affirms that the cooperation among the stakeholders, at the global, regional and national level, is crucial in the use of ICT for the attainment of the Millennium objectives. It promotes supporting and keeping to the Digital Solidarity Agenda to contribute to the reduction of the digital divide. It emphasizes the importance of assisting developing nations financially and technically.	<p>Recognizes the role of international rules of play in the global information economy. It considers that the global governmental frameworks must promote a more equal distribution of the benefits among nations and social groups and balance commercial considerations with legitimate social objectives.</p> <p>Maintains that international cooperation and agreements must promote efficient management of the networks' interconnections and the traffic-based distribution of profit; the fair assignation of the spectrum of radio frequencies and satellite orbital intervals that completely support development applications, not commercial ones; the fair trade of electronic goods and services; an open public domain of information resources and ideas; and the protection of human rights, consumer protection and personal privacy.</p> <p>In relation to the "Digital Solidarity Fund" proposed by Africa, it maintains that it could represent a real hope for the peoples of said continent if its goals are clearly established, if it is managed transparently and is oriented toward promoting primary public services, especially those of the populations that live in unattended, isolated areas.</p> <p>It encourages the establishment of a Community Media Fund as an association of civil society donors that supports and invests in community media based on and directed by the communities, as well as information and communication initiatives that use traditional communication media and new ICT. It advocates the elimination of the duplication of infrastructures in a national and regional framework to encourage the investment of funds.</p>

The vision and position of the civil society participants in the Summit has been extensively compiled in the "Civil Society Essential Benchmarks for WSIS" and the Civil Society Alternative Declaration for WSIS called " Shaping information societies for human needs" <sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Participating WSIS civil society developed and adopted its own documents throughout the first phase. They express an alternative vision and position on the information society and ICT. According to the point of view of civil society at WSIS, the official WSIS documents are limited and do not go beyond generalizations. The civil society documents arose, in great part, as a response to the real difficulties in influencing the official documents' content.

The specific positions on certain issues of some members and civil society organizations that have played an active role in the Summit process to date, can be read in the special edition of the APC's "ICT Policy Monitor in Latin America and the Caribbean" on the WSIS.<sup>25</sup>

## **The WSIS: A means but not an end**

At the end of the first phase of the Summit, various organizations and civil society members evaluated it to be failure in the generation of specific mechanisms for digital inclusion, and skepticism regarding the second phase is strong. In spite of this, this international event is seen as a valuable platform for discussion and reflection on the most important issues that shape the information society, integrating different regions, ideologies and sectors. In this sense, it is conceived as an opportunity to contribute to the formation of information societies based on human rights, social justice and development

The question is: Was and is participation in the WSIS worth it? The answers are many, but undoubtedly, the general consensus is that, despite serious difficulties for the effective participation of civil society there are, on the one hand, important results and lessons learned and, on the other hand, clear guidelines to transfer global discourse to local practice.

In the formal process, the intense and difficult task of civil society was reflected in the inclusion of some of its most important issues in the final draft of the Declaration. References to the universal declaration of human rights, gender equality and free software, are examples to be highlighted. Nevertheless, the real achievement of the WSIS lies beyond it and its formal space. It lies in the activation of national processes, the impulse in awareness initiatives on the importance and impact of ICT policy, the generation of conditions and effective strategies on impact and public participation in ICT policy development.

As a result of the work and debate that arose in the context of the Summit, more organizations and civil society members are progressively becoming more involved in ICT policy issues and are transferring their experience and knowledge to the local and national level. The possibility of promoting national and regional collaboration spaces and developing a collective potential to influence ICT policy process has also been created.

This potential to influence policy spheres and regulations basically involves counteracting existing tendencies and transforming people and organizations from site consumers into creative ICT users; promoting capacity building in the use of tools, and understanding the different issues related to ICT policy;

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<sup>25</sup>Newsletter No.8 February 2004, <http://lac.derechos.apc.org/boletines.shtml> (in Spanish)

strategically planning the use and application of ICT; and strengthening the collaboration between networks, as well as alliance building.<sup>26</sup>

It is essential to stimulate the debate from a variety of different perspectives and spaces, in all regions of the planet. Awareness raising on priority subjects and issues for the different regions is fundamental for the construction and strengthening of the capacities of civil society organisations, as well as, ensuring that the collective definition of the issues related to the IS and ICT benefit their countries. It is also necessary to analyze the relationship between the WSIS and other multilateral global, regional and sub-regional processes and their impact on the development of information societies.

The material reality and civil society's capacity to transform adverse conditions into real development opportunities with the use of ICT lies beyond the Summit. Information societies focused on people and their rights are in construction. Building them through participatory, democratic and transparent institutions and mechanisms is a challenge for everyone.

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<sup>26</sup> See ¿Whose "Information society"?, by Anriette Esterhuysen  
[http://www.apc.org/english/about/history/english.shtml?cmd\[384\]=i-575-17983](http://www.apc.org/english/about/history/english.shtml?cmd[384]=i-575-17983)