

World Summit on the Information Society

10 July 2003

Civil Society Priorities Document: (Draft of 10 July 2003)

WSIS - Civil Society Working Group on Content and Themes

The civil society organisations endorsing this document are well aware of the potential importance of the WSIS, which is why we are investing in this process. While we understand that the WSIS has no explicit normative nor programmatic objective (no treaty is expected out of it, nor does it have decision-making power to unleash new funding), we consider that it offers a unique framework at the international level, where not only different visions can be shared among a variety of stakeholders and cultures, but also basic agreements on the shape of future policies could emerge.

Given the breadth and complexity of the issues involved, an integral vision is essential. A partial approach is likely to result in policies that could further deepen both digital and social divides, or exacerbate other negative impacts that are emerging.

We therefore welcome the broadened range of issues covered by the present draft documents for the WSIS. We are concerned, nonetheless, that certain key areas are still missing inadequately addressed or do not make consensus. The following lines will draw attention to these issues that constitute priorities for civil society.

As a starting point, the WSIS should avoid idealising the information society (IS). It is one thing to describe the vision of the IS we rightly aspire to, as orientation for policies, ("The information society should be people centered...", Art 8:), and quite another to state that "The information society *is* a new and higher form of social organization..." (Art. 9), which could mislead us into ignoring dangers and undesirable effects.

Sustainable democratic development

An equitable Information Society must be based on sustainable economic and social development. This cannot be achieved solely through market-led solutions, which will not automatically lead to equitable service or lower cost, particularly in less profitable areas or for low-income social groups, or where virtual monopolies exist. In order to balance commercial objectives with legitimate social interests, a principle of equitable access to services and affordable cost should be reaffirmed, and recognition given to the need for appropriate regulation and development of public services.

Development cooperation in the area of sustainable development should reaffirm the principle of solidarity between richer and poorer areas of the world.

ICTs have great potential for developing more democratic, transparent and participative processes of governance, from the local to the international level, which should be more explicitly supported in the Action Plan. But technologies also have the potential of enabling the perpetuation and expansion of existing, undemocratic power relations and inequalities within and between nations. This would be incompatible with the goals of sustainable development within the information society. Communities must therefore be empowered to develop their own productive forces within the information society, in particular to participate in its development and sustenance through fully democratic processes that allow them to share control of the decision making around economic, cultural, environmental, and other issues regarding ICT-based projects.

The action plan should address proposals to develop and nurture the discipline of community informatics, which responds to the particular characteristics and needs of communities, in relation to design, development, deployment, and operation of ICTs, as well as local content production.

ICTs can contribute to sustainability, but computers are also creating new environmental hazards. In view of mainstreaming ICTs into sustainable development, the action plan should include concrete proposals and policies to: develop renewable energy resources, particularly for remote communities; improve resource efficiency; dematerialize and reduce waste; increase the useful life of hardware; improve recycling conditions and ensure safe disposal of discarded ICT hardware and parts.

Human rights:

An information and communication society that has people and human needs at its centre implies underlining the importance of human rights standards as the core set of principles guiding its development. Communication is a fundamental participative and interactive process and is the foundation of all societal organization. In order to ensure freedom of expression and the right to information, the WSIS Declaration should therefore affirm that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) must be not only adhered to but also **actively enforced**.

In addition, the principles of a better-balanced flow of information, free circulation of ideas, press freedom, participation in the communication process, and knowledge sharing will become meaningful inasmuch as they are supported by a consistent articulation of rights. This would include the reference to the relevant articles from the UDHR, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, relating, among other things, to: privacy, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, freedom of peaceful association, right to education and to participation in cultural life of the community, protection from discrimination or hate incitement, among others. We also welcome the references to communication as a right.

Similarly, the WSIS should refer to improvement of HR standards, such as human and social development, democracy and participation, as focus points for setting goals and measures for progress.

Literacy, Education, and Research

Literacy, education and research are fundamental components of information and knowledge societies. Knowledge creation and acquisition should be nurtured as a participatory and collective process and not considered a one-way flow. But only an informed and educated citizenry with access to the means and outputs of pluralistic research can fully participate in and effectively contribute to knowledge societies.

Urgent attention should be paid to the potential positive and negative impacts of ICTs on the issues of illiteracy in national and international languages of the great majority of the world's people. Literacy, education, and research efforts in the Information Society must include a focus on the needs of people who have physical impairments and the elderly.

The action plan should devote attention to the tools, facilities and resources that enable lifelong learning. Capacity building designed to empower individuals and communities in the Information Society must include, in addition to just basic literacy and ICT skills, information literacy (i.e. the ability to find, appraise, use and create information). Publicly funded and independent writing and research, in all parts of the world, are essential for building a pluralistic and diverse body of knowledge in information societies. Gender sensitive educational programmes and appropriate learning environments including e-learning must be developed to increase women's access to education and employment.

Also, computer and information science professionals must be encouraged to perform the continuous task of educating the public about both the social risks and benefits of existing and emerging technologies within the information society.

Global Governance

Global Governance in information societies should be based on a multi-stakeholder bottom up policy development process (buPDP), which should be as inclusive as possible and open to all groups, in particular to stakeholders most closely concerned by a certain policy. Global Governance should be based on the principles of openness and transparency. Decision making bodies should be composed of representatives of all stakeholders, selected by their respective constituencies; with a geographically, functionally and gender balanced composition, and a consensus basis for operation.

Global Internet Governance (GIG) should include all public policy aspects of the global management of cyberspace. This includes issues such as content regulation on the Internet, free speech, access, privacy, information security, data protection, e-commerce, intellectual property rights, information infrastructure development etc.

A special part of GIG is the governance of the core resources of the Internet, that are the internet identifiers such as domain names and IP addresses as well as the Internet Protocols (IP) and the root server. The governance of Internet identifiers should be based on the buPDP principle, including providers, users and relevant public policy bodies, and must serve the interests of the global and local Internet community.

Global knowledge commons

The Declaration should include, as a principle and theme, the maintenance and growth of the commonwealth of human knowledge as a means of reducing global inequality and of providing the conditions for intellectual creativity, sustainable development and respect for human rights. The privatisation of knowledge and information through copyright, patents and trademarks is ceasing to be an effective means of rewarding creative endeavour or encouraging innovation. Instead it is contributing to the growth of inequality and the exploitation of the poorest peoples and communities.

The Action Plan must defend and extend the global knowledge commons, through public policy and investment in open source and open content, including both applications and human capacity development, as well as through access to public communication platforms for sharing of knowledge and information. The Action Plan should commit to a fundamental review of the impact on poverty and human rights of current arrangements for recognition and governance of privately held knowledge and information, including the work of WIPO and the functioning of the TRIPS agreement.

The Action Plan should give particular attention to measures to maintain knowledge diversity and to protect the knowledge pool of indigenous peoples, especially botanical and agricultural knowledge, against "information mining" and other unfair exploitation.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

The Declaration should adopt as a statement of principle the need to respect cultural and linguistic diversity. Communications media and information technologies have a particularly important role to play in sustaining the world's cultures and languages. The implementation of this principle requires support for a plurality of means of information and communication including community-driven communications initiatives.

The Action Plan should promote legislative, regulatory, technological and financial measures to support communications media and information pluralism; and should allow for specific safeguards against the concentration of media ownership. It should reinforce rights of access to the media and the means of information and expression for all peoples including rights of linguistic and cultural minorities. The Action Plan should support the development of public service broadcast media including community media.

The Action Plan should support new information and communication technologies, which can reinforce cultural and linguistic diversity through, for example, translation, voice recognition and other means of transcending cultural and linguistic barriers.

"Information security" issues.

Existing policies on information security often impinge unnecessarily upon the rights of individuals, and may be technologically and economically problematic. The Declaration should contain, as a statement of principle, that the informed involvement of all stakeholders is an essential component to the development of any policy at the local, national, and international levels.

The action plan must address efforts to create a culture of security and confidence in technological, economic, and legal issues that help to ensure a technologically reliable infrastructure. This includes

calling for education and open discourse, inventories of recommended best practices, and impact assessments of potential policies.

The lack of civil liberties consideration in existing international frameworks and conventions makes these solutions inappropriate. The action plan should include a call for developing means through which local and international stakeholders can ensure equitable and just protection of rights as international legal solutions are devised.

We are opposed to the Council of Europe's *Cybercrime Convention*. Civil society organisations have been working for a number of years to educate and inform the convention's development to little avail and are now opposing its ratification because of its overly broad mandate, its insensitivity to local issues and its disregard for civil liberties.

Access and infrastructure issues

Global universal access to communication and information should be a target of the WSIS action plan. The expansion of the global information infrastructure should be based on principles of equality and partnership and guided by rules of fair competition and regulation at both national and international levels. The integration of access, infrastructure and training of the citizenry and the generation of local content, in a framework of social networks and clear public or private policies, is a key basis for the development of egalitarian and inclusive information societies. The evolution of policy should be coordinated internationally but enable a diversity of appropriate solutions based on national and regional input and international sharing of information and resources. This should be people-centered and process-orientated, rather than technologically determined and expert dominated.

International bandwidth costs and allocation of spectrum and geo-stationary positions should be equitable and the current burdens of cost unfairly weighted to under developed contexts must be eliminated as an integral part of the process of equitable global communications infrastructure. All regions should participate in relevant decision making processes.

National access and infrastructure plans must address the divide between socio-economic groups and between urban and rural areas. Implementation should be measured by internationally agreed indicators and time frames that address access, and affordable energy.

Open source software that enables access and the development of capacity should be an essential component of all communications roll out plans.

Information infrastructure must allow for future expansion and development. Roll out plans should be inclusive of existing media distribution and ensure that long term comprehensive solutions to access and infrastructure are developed.

A digital solidarity fund should be established to ensure the implementation of roll out plans on infrastructure development. WSIS should agree to draw up an International Convention on a policy of subsidised tariffs and prices for Digital Inclusion projects and promote the creation of an International Fund for Internet Bandwidth for such projects.

Gender

Evidence of governments' commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment remain largely absent from the WSIS Agenda.

The Declaration must adopt as a statement of principle a fundamental commitment to gender equality, non-discrimination and women's empowerment, and recognize these as non-negotiable and essential prerequisites to an equitable and people-centred development within the Information Society.

To advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the Information society, the Action Plan must demonstrate commitment to redress the effects of the intersection of unequal power relations in the social, economic and political spheres, which manifests in differential access, choice, opportunity, participation,

status and control over resources between women and men as well as communities in terms of class, ethnicity, religion, race, geographical location and development status.

The Action Plan should endorse the call of gender and ICT advocates for the development of governance and policy frameworks, the setting of quantitative and qualitative targets, programmes, activities, applications and tools, and a system of monitoring and evaluation which would redress shortcomings of current gender mainstreaming approaches.

Attention to other regional and international processes

Finally, we wish to draw the attention of the different stakeholders active in the WSIS process to a major risk. Essential decisions are already being taken, in other regional and international political arenas that may not be consistent with the vision and values elaborated here.

Work in progress of supra-national organisations such as the Council of Europe (e.g. its CyberCrime Treaty, the European Union (e.g. its Directives on copyright and software patents, the WIPO, the ITU itself (e.g. its new rules on *taxe de répartition*), the WTO (e.g. its decisions taken within the frame of the AGCS) all have huge potential consequences for knowledge, education and culture.

We therefore recommend that the WSIS participants:

1. Establish a multi-stakeholders observatory committee that would be responsible for:
 - mapping decision-making in other political arenas that impacts or intersects with the WSIS agenda;
 - establish a monitoring system to ensure that decisions taken in other political arenas that relate to the information society are consistent with the general framework established by the WSIS process; and
 - reporting to all stakeholders of the WSIS on a regular basis until December 2005.
2. In the development of international legal frameworks, give preference to those bodies which empower the effective participation of developing countries in decision making process to redress the current trend of exporting of frameworks developed by Western countries, to the global level.

Endorsements

[To be completed]