Whose Summit? Whose Information Society?

*Developing countries and civil society at
the World Summit on the Information Society*

APC

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the World Summit on the Information Society*

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THIS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE REPORT IS ADAPTED FROM A SUMMARY PUBLISHED AS A SEPARATE DOCUMENT DURING THE FIRST MEETING OF THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM IN OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2006. IT PROVIDES AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MAIN REPORT ONLY, AND DOES NOT INCLUDE ALL OF THE ISSUES RAISED IN THAT REPORT.

Introduction

The World Summit on the Information Society - WSIS - was the largest single activity in international discussion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) during the past ten years – at least in scale. It absorbed a great deal of time and other resources of international organisations, governments, civil society organisations and businesses over a four-year period (2001-2005). It produced four documents setting out aspirations for the information society. It provided a framework for international debate on infrastructure finance and Internet governance. But it received only limited public attention and failed to bridge the paradigm gap between the worlds of information technology and international development.

This report summarises a study of developing country and civil society participation and influence in WSIS that was commissioned by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). As well as analysing participation, the study looked at the impact of WSIS on international ICT decision-making in general and makes recommendations to all main actors about how future decision-making might become more inclusive of developing countries, non-governmental actors and their concerns. In particular, it revisits the conclusions of the "Louder Voices" report on developing country involvement in decision-making, published at the G8 summit in 2002, which identified a series of weaknesses in both international organisations and national policymaking processes which contributed to poor participation – and it asks how these have and have not changed as a result of WSIS.

This study drew on five main sources of evidence:

- Participant observation of the WSIS process throughout its four-year period, by the principal author, David Souter, and research associate, Abiodun Jagun

- Desk research, particularly the documentation produced within the WSIS process by all stakeholders, including developing countries and civil society

- Questionnaires and interviews with many individual participants in WSIS preparatory committees (PrepComs) and in the two summit sessions (Geneva, 2003; Tunis, 2005)

- Detailed interviews with forty key actors in the WSIS process

- Case studies of experience in five developing countries - Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ethiopia, India and Kenya.

This executive summary briefly summarises the main issues, conclusions and recommendations of the report. It does not include all of the issues covered in the main report that follows.

The WSIS story

The origins of WSIS lay in a decision taken, without debate, at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)'s 1998 Plenipotentiary Conference, calling on the ITU to organise a world summit on the information society. It is doubtful if ITU delegates expected this to be a global summit of the kind which the United Nations holds regularly on different issues, but that is what WSIS became when it won the backing of other UN agencies.

There is a standard process for the organisation of world summits. The summit meeting itself is the last stage of a prolonged process of negotiation, and is primarily an opportunity for heads of state and government to make public statements and commit their countries to a formal declaration. The real work takes place in complex discussions over the previous year or two, in a series of regional meetings and preparatory committees (or PrepComs). These are where the text that is eventually signed is hammered out, and in which disputes are either resolved or shelved.

WSIS mostly followed this standard structure, but its organisation differed from the standard model in two main ways.

Firstly, it was organised in two phases - one two-year phase leading to the first summit meeting in Geneva in December 2003, another to the second summit meeting in Tunis in November 2005. This was justified as an opportunity to devote separate discussions to (firstly) principles and (secondly) implementation - though the underlying reason was failure to choose between two willing hosts. There were therefore five regional meetings during the first phase and four during the second; as well as three full PrepComs and a number of additional meetings in each phase.

Secondly, WSIS was organised by a technical agency of the United Nations, the ITU, rather than by the UN's central organisation. This was not uncontroversial. The "information society" includes wide-ranging cultural and developmental issues which many considered the responsibility of agencies like UNESCO and the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP) rather than the technocratic ITU. An underlying tension between broader development goals and goals of the ICT sector lasted throughout WSIS. Some within the ITU also saw the summit as an opportunity for it to redesign itself and broaden its mandate from telecommunications to wider information technology and information society issues. This was opposed by some ITU members, other international agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The first phase of WSIS, up to the Geneva summit in 2003, developed two general texts - a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action. These texts were agreed in negotiations between governments, though other stakeholders sought to influence them with varying degrees of success. The Declaration sets out the summit's (considerable) aspirations for the role of ICTs in transforming social and economic life. The Plan of Action brings together many different issues and identifies possible areas for international action, together with suggested actions on which agreement could be reached. These included targets related to the Millennium Development Goals.

A number of issues proved contentious during the first phase, including the right of non-governmental stakeholders to take part in WSIS negotiations, and issues concerning information and communication rights (particularly their relationship to fundamental agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Two issues, however, proved intractable and were referred to separate fora established by the UN Secretary-General, which met between the first and second WSIS phases.

- The Task Force on Financial Mechanisms (TFFM) was initially concerned with a proposal to establish a Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF), supported by many African governments, but opposed by donors. Its remit extended, however, to ICT infrastructure finance in general, and its conclusions were mostly concerned with this. The TFFM worked along conventional UN task force lines, in which limited representatives of interested parties reviewed issues on the basis of consultants' reports.

- The Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) was concerned with anxieties expressed, primarily by developing countries, about the way the Internet operated – in particular, the perception that critical aspects of the Internet (particularly the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, ICANN), which governs domain identities, and the root server system) were ultimately controlled by the United States, rather than a conventional international or inter-governmental forum. It adopted innovative working methods, in which a wide range of participants from the whole range of stakeholder groups worked together to resolve differences and establish a common frame of reference for further negotiations.

The second phase of WSIS agreed not to reopen discussion of the first phase texts and so was almost entirely concerned with these two deferred issues and with the question of follow-up activity. In practice, issues of infrastructure finance were resolved relatively quickly, and the final year of the WSIS process was overwhelmingly concerned with Internet governance. Both issues are described further below.

The final outputs of the WSIS process were two further documents, the Tunis Commitment, reiterating the first summit's conclusions, and the Tunis Agenda, drawing out the second summit's conclusions on infrastructure finance and Internet governance and setting out follow-up procedures for implementation.

The following sections of this summary in turn review the findings of the APC WSIS study concerning the organisation of WSIS, the issues discussed, and the participation of developing country and civil society actors in them.

The organisation of WSIS

Global summits are expensive ways of doing international business. They require large investments in time and money, especially for the governments of smaller countries and for non-governmental actors, and they raise high expectations. Because they rely on global consensus, however, they often get bogged down in controversial detail and are less likely to innovate than more informal fora. They are usually thought to be best at forcing governments to confront intractable problems of fundamental importance at the most senior level, but less good at developing strategies to meet new opportunities.

Kofi Annan's view, expressed at the opening of the Geneva summit, that "This summit is unique: where most global conferences focus on global threats, this one will consider how best to use a new global asset," was, therefore, not seen by everyone as positive. Although little voiced in public at the time the UN General Assembly agreed to hold WSIS, there was a good deal of scepticism amongst international officials and (particularly) industrial country governments about the merits of a world summit on the information society. Many others were concerned about the cost - both in general and to their own organisations.

Many different interests therefore came together in the WSIS process, and it was always going to be difficult for the secretariat, managed by the ITU, and the summit process as a whole to meet the different aspirations and expectations of different stakeholder groups. What implications did these factors have on the way in which different stakeholders behaved and the summit itself evolved? The study draws conclusions around this in four main areas.

Firstly, the interaction between WSIS and other decision-making fora was poor. Although it did involve the ITU and did address issues of Internet governance, it had very little interaction with the actual decision-making work which the ITU and Internet governance bodies engaged in during the four years it took place, and it had even less interaction with other significant international fora of importance to communications (such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO)). Prior international discourse on information, communications and development, such as the work of the G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force) and a variety of UN agencies, did not greatly inform WSIS debates either. WSIS was not, overall, seen as a significant decision-making body by industrial countries, which were, by and large, represented at a much lower level than developing countries in WSIS processes and at the two summit meetings.

Secondly, the central role of the ITU had an important impact on the nature of participation and discussion in WSIS. The ITU is essentially a technical agency and had little expertise in the wider rights, development and political questions that profoundly affected discussions at WSIS. Although it sought to address these weaknesses, and although other UN agencies were also involved in overall WSIS management, the fact that the ITU led the process meant that governments tended to give lead responsibility for their own participation to ministries of communications rather than to central or developmental ministries. WSIS therefore did very little to reduce the "paradigm gap" between ICT specialists and mainstream development communities which has become a significant concern for the development community.

Thirdly, the two-phase approach failed to deliver. Rather than enabling the discussion to move from principles in phase one to implementation in phase two, agreement on the main development and societal issues in phase one stifled further discussion about them in phase two. Many important developments in ICTs and their application in development occurred in the four-year WSIS period, but these are barely reflected in its final outcome documents. Many in development agencies felt that these were already outdated as they were agreed. Four years is, in any case, a long time to spend discussing a sector as fast-moving as ICTs. Those who argue that the second phase was, in effect, a world summit on Internet governance are not far from the mark; and the limited nature of that outcome leaves a big question mark over the merits of a two-phase summit. While some participants feel quite strongly that the two-phase approach facilitated networking and understanding among participants, this was at high cost, and it is unlikely that the WSIS experience will encourage the UN to repeat it in future.

Finally, a number of important organisational issues arose concerning the participation of non-governmental stakeholders (the private sector and civil society), in the summit itself and in the two "interim fora", the TFFM and the WGIG. Multistakeholder principles were adopted in the WSIS texts but contested in WSIS negotiations. The TFFM and the WGIG adopted very different ways of working with

different stakeholders. The WGIG's very open approach to non-governmental actors has been seen as a potential model for future dialogue in other international issues – a point discussed further below.

WSIS issues

WSIS meant different things to different people. Prima facie, a World Summit on the Information Society might have been expected to address issues of importance in many aspects of all societies. The concept, after all, implies a comprehensive transformation of society and economy, comparable to that following the Industrial Revolution. In practice, WSIS did not address the "Information Society" on this grand scale but focused on a much narrower range of issues - the relationship between ICTs and fundamental rights, that between ICTs and development, infrastructure finance and Internet governance. It paid much more attention to developing countries than to industrial countries. At most, therefore, it might be called a summit on aspects of the information society rather than on the information society per se.

The relationship between information and fundamental human rights was contested from the start of the WSIS process when some governments sought to exclude explicit references to binding rights agreements from draft WSIS texts. Although references to fundamental rights were eventually included, the underlying tensions between freedom of expression and government authority remained throughout the summit, and were put in sharper focus by arguments over freedom of expression in the second host country, Tunisia. The WSIS texts do not discuss rights issues in any substance, and do not address the potential which ICTs have for adjusting the balance of rights and responsibilities between citizens and governments.

The WSIS texts on the role of ICTs in development are also disappointing. WSIS overall had a strongly pro-ICD (information and communications in development) ethos, but its texts do not reflect the fact that this ethos is not universally shared within the development community. While the WSIS texts therefore emphasised the potential, as they saw it, for ICTs to engender a step change in countries' ability to overcome development challenges, the Millennium Review Summit, held just a couple of months before the Tunis summit, had almost nothing to say about ICTs in its review of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Many who work at the interface of ICTs and development policy see this as an opportunity missed, and regret the fact that WSIS failed to create a genuine dialogue between ICT and development communities, or between ICD enthusiasts and sceptics. There are many reasons why this might

have happened. For reasons discussed above, WSIS was attended by ICT professionals rather than development specialists. Its overall ethos encouraged enthusiasts to participate, and sceptics to stay away. The process used to gather input for inclusion in the outcome documents made it easier to construct lists of aspirations and desiderata than to analyse the evidence and draw priorities. Summit statements often emphasise rhetoric over realism, and avoid addressing issues of contention. The result, in WSIS' case, was text that reflected the views of ICD believers without addressing the concerns of sceptics.

This is not to say that WSIS did not build awareness and understanding of the potential importance of ICTs in development. Many in developing country governments, in particular, stress how much more familiar they became with the issues as a result of exposure through WSIS and how much more importance is now attached to them by their governments. At the same time, however, WSIS did nothing to convince multilateral agencies and bilateral donors of the case for ICD. It has not led to widespread new commitments in the ICD field, and some agencies have made reductions on past engagement. It seems possible that WSIS may come to be seen as the highpoint of ICD enthusiasm rather than a stimulus to new development initiatives.

One exception to this conclusion is the area of infrastructure finance. The proposal for a Digital Solidarity Fund during the first phase of the summit posed a significant problem for donors since it sought a reallocation of development finance outside the terms of the global development consensus represented by the Monterrey Convention and the Millennium Development Goals. ICT infrastructure, in this consensus, was considered adequately addressed by the private sector, and to many in donor agencies support for the DSF looked like an attempt to secure funding for the ICT sector at the expense of other development priorities (such as power, water, health and education). The dispute here was almost enough to prevent agreement on a draft text being reached before the first phase summit opened its plenary session.

In this case, the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms developed an approach which recognised that access in some geographical areas and some types of ICT infrastructure could not be financed by the private sector alone and that international and/or public finance would also be required.

This was accompanied by a move to support African ICT infrastructure by the World Bank and the European Union, and together these proved sufficient to enable global agreement on the issue to be reached at an early stage in the second phase of WSIS. The Digital Solidarity Fund proposal was transformed into a small voluntary organisation. A consensus, therefore, was quickly reached – with the result that the significance of the shift in thinking about infrastructure finance has been missed by many.

No-one expected WSIS to be preoccupied by Internet governance when the summit was first mooted. Some argue that it was an issue waiting in the wings for the right occasion to come along; others that its prominence was largely the result of political factors concerning different countries' relations with the United States. A central aspect of the question is the fact that, almost uniquely in human history, the Internet has become very important, very quickly, with very little government or inter-governmental involvement. For most governments, this was an anomaly in need of resolution (though for some governments and much of civil society and the private sector it was a positive factor that should be preserved). Here, then, were two principal contests of authority: between governments and non-governmental agencies, and between those governments perceived to have authority over the Internet worldwide (principally the United States) and those feeling they had none at home.

This issue remained highly politicised and contentious to the very end of WSIS. Although substantial and consensual, the WGIG's report did not secure the same consensus within WSIS as that of the TFFM. The final outcome – compromises on "enhanced cooperation" within existing Internet governance and the creation of an Internet Governance Forum with substantial scope but insignificant powers – left the issues largely in the air. One way of looking at this suggests that it represents another step within the Internet's long-term evolution – a step that continues the erosion of its original North American identity, rather than the revolutionary step that some desired; perhaps also a step that tends to bring the Internet further within the ambit of government or inter-governmental oversight. But the arguments over Internet governance were in no sense resolved by WSIS and will continue in the future.

Developing country participation

Summits differ from conventional, permanent international decision-making fora, such as the ITU and the WTO, in many ways – not least because they are more politicised and because their outcomes usually have less immediate practical effect. Less expertise is needed to participate effectively in summits, while the need for consensus (rather than majority vote) also gives more weight to smaller and less powerful countries.

Nevertheless, developing country participation in WSIS varied markedly in scale. The Internet governance debate in particular provided a platform for a small number of larger developing countries to assert their influence and authority, in a way comparable with similar new alignments in (for example) WTO negotiations. Smaller countries and LDCs (Least Developed Countries), by contrast, tended to be more concerned with specific development questions, such as infrastructure finance, and played a less politicised

role in Summit negotiations. It is important, in this context, not to confuse the increased influence of a few major developing countries with any change in influence for the developing world as a whole, particularly LDCs.

Across WSIS overall, national delegations were largely made up of diplomats and telecommunications sector professionals. Geneva diplomatic missions and home-based diplomats tended to play the main role in formal negotiations, as in other international agreements regardless of sector. National policy discourse was usually led by communications ministries and, diplomats aside, a lot of delegations were made up mostly of people from the traditional telecommunications establishment (the communications ministry and regulator and the incumbent fixed network operator). Mobile networks, the Internet community and private sector operators were poorly represented, if at all, in most delegations, and there were also few participants from mainstream development ministries. Women were also under-represented.

A few, but only a few, developing countries included civil society representatives in their delegations, while some strongly opposed the presence of civil society representatives, even as observers, in formal negotiations – which, in all summits, are inter-governmental in character. National case studies carried out for this report showed considerable variation, too, in the extent of consultation and participation in WSIS discourse at a national level. In many countries, policymaking remained largely within the narrow confines of government ICT officials; though in some, such as Kenya, civil society and private sector actors played a significant part. Media attention to WSIS was minimal in most cases.

The regional conferences did not play as great a part in the WSIS process as the preparatory committees. The fact that they were continental in scale may have inhibited attention to detail, where sub-regional conferences might have made a bigger contribution. The African regional conferences were both vibrant events, with substantial civil society input and impact. Others were less dynamic, and Europe did not even bother with a regional conference in the second phase.

WSIS was, ultimately, a one-off event, in which developing country participation was more substantial and assertive than it is in permanent ICT decision-making fora such as the ITU and the WTO. Partly, this was because summit dynamics make it easier for developing countries to manage their participation; partly because industrial countries did not see WSIS as a priority. Few interviewees for the study, however, felt that WSIS had significantly changed the balance of power in ongoing policy debates in permanent decision-making fora, likely outcomes arising from them, or their arrangements for participation, except where Internet governance is concerned. The ITU discussed some WSIS-related changes at its November

2006 Plenipotenary Conference, but it is not yet clear how these – and the ITU's own identity – will develop.

In practice, the report concludes that the institutional dynamics of participation require much more substantial changes in both international institutions and national policymaking processes if they are to enhance developing country participation – a conclusion very much in line with that of the "Louder Voices" report. While WSIS raised awareness of ICT and ICD issues in many countries, at least amongst government officials and some NGOs, it did not facilitate capacity-building or change policymaking relationships at a national level. Unless those weaknesses are addressed, many developing countries will find it as difficult to represent their priorities effectively in future in specialist ICT decision-making fora as they did before WSIS, which might be considered another opportunity missed.

Civil society participation

One of the most important "Louder Voices" conclusions concerned the extent of private sector and civil society participation in ICT policy. Because of the way ICTs and particularly the Internet have evolved, much relevant expertise resides in the private sector and civil society rather than in government.

Although some governments opposed this, the WSIS outcome texts make much of the importance of multistakeholder involvement – the principle, as the Geneva Plan of Action puts it, that "the effective participation of governments and all stakeholders is vital in developing the Information Society[,] requiring cooperation and partnerships among all of them."[1]

Civil society involvement in summits has increased over the years, sometimes including the holding of "alternative" summits alongside the main event. No such alternative happened in the case of WSIS, but the summit did represent a significant advance in civil society participation. The ITU's lack of experience with civil society may have fostered this, by giving more autonomy and responsibility to a civil society bureau within the secretariat, just as its extensive experience with the private sector may have opened spaces for that stakeholder group. Nevertheless, the opening stages of the first summit phase were dominated by arguments about the rights of civil society and the private sector to participate – arguments which helped the two non-governmental stakeholder groups to build more of a common understanding between them than they had contrived elsewhere. (This was also helped by very effective coordination of private sector participation.)

In the Geneva phase of WSIS, civil society had a wider range of issues to discuss. The whole character of the "information society" seemed up for grabs, and there were points of principle to argue on a wide range of issues around which civil society could coalesce. The hostility of some government delegations to civil society's presence also fostered a sense of community and solidarity. Civil society engagement focused on rights issues, and had relatively little impact on the text on development. These factors were less apparent in the Tunis phase, which focused much more narrowly on Internet governance. However, this was an issue in which civil society found other ways of influencing outcomes – in the WGIG, for example, and through dialogue with those government delegates who shared many of the Internet community's objectives. The quality of civil society organisation was weaker in the second phase, but the Internet Governance Caucus provided a powerful instrument to advance positions which it shared with the Internet community. On the whole, therefore, the space for civil society participation in WSIS was sufficient to ensure that most civil society organisations felt there was more value in constructive engagement than in opposition. Caucusing played an important role in developing civil society overviews and in strategy and tactics, as it has at other recent summits.

Civil society participation in WSIS PrepComs and, to a lesser extent, the Geneva and Tunis summit sessions, was, like that of governments, concentrated amongst those with particular ICT/ICD interests. Few mainstream development or human rights NGOs attended any part of the process, and this greatly weakened civil society's capacity to contribute to the development agenda. Developing countries were also disproportionately under-represented in civil society participation – partly because of lack of resources, partly because few civil society organisations in developing countries had tracked information society issues in the past, and partly because those which had were less likely to be included in their own national discourse on WSIS issues.

The costs and benefits of civil society participation in WSIS are still debated. The financial cost and opportunity cost in personnel time were very considerable for those organisations that took WSIS seriously. Policy gains, in terms of WSIS outcomes, were limited. Where gains were made was in extending organisations' understanding of issues and in their building networks outside their own regions and specialisms that would not otherwise have been available to them. The value of this should not be underestimated, though it is questionable how well these networks can survive without the focus that WSIS PrepComs provided for them.

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1   Geneva Plan of Action, section C1, article 8.

After WSIS

The final question to be asked of WSIS concerns its follow-up processes. These can be divided into three groups.

a. Some overview implementation processes were set in place, reporting to the UN General Assembly, as with other summits.

b. In the case of Internet governance, ambiguous compromises were reached to foster "enhanced cooperation" in order "to enable governments, on an equal footing, to carry out their roles and responsibilities, in international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet,"[2] and to establish a multistakeholder Internet Governance Forum with no substantive powers but extensive scope.

c. A list of eleven "action lines" was established (with a further eight subsidiary lines) to undertake otherwise unspecified "multi-stakeholder implementation at the international level."[3]

Internet governance developments have continued to attract the interest and attention of all stakeholder groups, principally because the issues remain unresolved. They will continue to do so, and Internet governance institutions will continue to change, as they have done throughout the Internet's history. How they change is yet unclear, but the profile of Internet governance has become and will remain much more substantial as a result of its politicisation in the WSIS process. The breadth and quality of discourse at the first meeting of the Internet Governance Forum met with a very positive response from most participants.

The WSIS texts on wider information society issues are far from the cutting edge of development thinking, and are proving of little interest to those who are seriously engaged in ICD. The first round of action line meetings held in May 2006 was very poorly attended and produced little in the way of new initiatives. It seems unlikely that these will offer any significant legacy for WSIS, which is likely to remain largely a stand-alone event in the history of ICT/ICD.

One significant question which is often asked is whether the WGIG experience of multistakeholder participation offers a model for use in other international fora. The report concludes that this is possible, but in limited contexts. The WGIG was concerned with an area of international governance in which governments and inter-governmental institutions were not predominant. Multistakeholder participation and processes were easier to instigate, therefore, because they did not challenge existing (inter-)governmental authority. The WGIG's process – as a genuinely "working" group of diverse individuals – was also particularly suited to an issue which was both complex and highly politicised and where many disputants were largely ignorant of the technical complexities involved. There are some other international issues which are similarly complex and politicised, and where issues are poorly understood, but relatively few. These would be much more susceptible to this approach than issues which do not share all these characteristics.

Conclusion

What lasting impact has WSIS had on the "information society" and on developing country and civil society participation?

Almost a year on from the Tunis summit, it is difficult to see that WSIS has had a lasting impact on the issues it discussed, with the exception of Internet governance. The quality of its development texts was poor. Much more significant documents and initiatives in this context have been written and undertaken outside the WSIS framework during the past five years than within it. WSIS does seem to have drawn more attention to the lack of evidence and critical evaluation available concerning ICT's impact on development, and to the paradigm gap between ICT and development professionals. Some international agencies are now seeking to address these. Many developing country governments were made more aware of ICT issues by WSIS, and ICT and ICD are being included in more Poverty Reduction Strategies. There has also been a shift, following the TFFM, in thinking about infrastructure finance. However, these developments do not represent a revolution in thinking about the information society of the kind that WSIS' advocates had hoped to see.

At an institutional level, WSIS has not had a significant impact on the deliberations or processes of most existing permanent international ICT decision-making fora. WSIS did allow the ITU to push the boundaries of its mandate beyond telecommunications towards the information society to some extent, but within limits. If anything, the WSIS process probably increased hostility to the idea of it playing a major role in Internet governance, rather than advancing the case for this. The scope for the ITU extending its developmental role is constrained by both its own members' wishes and those of other agencies within the UN system. The ambiguous compromise on Internet governance reached in Tunis will be played out over some time to come. The meaning of "enhanced cooperation" and the role of the Internet Governance Forum are yet unclear; but WSIS is likely to mark a stage in the evolution of Internet management which itself is likely to see increased government involvement alongside that of its historic stakeholders. The action lines on development issues set up as part of WSIS follow-up do not seem likely to make a significant or lasting contribution.

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2 Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, article 69.

3 ibid., article 108.

Developing country participation in WSIS was significantly higher than in other ICT decision-making fora, but WSIS did not in fact make significant decisions. The more assertive role played by some larger developing countries may follow through to other fora, notably in Internet governance, but WSIS has not equipped smaller and less well-resourced developing countries to participate more effectively in permanent fora like the ITU and WTO, which will have more lasting influence than WSIS. Institutional changes in the way those organisations manage their processes and national changes to improve the quality, scope and inclusiveness of national policy debates are still fundamental to enabling developing countries to articulate their issues and concerns more effectively in permanent decision-making fora. The dominance of WSIS delegations by ICT professionals, and the very limited participation of development specialists, meant that WSIS did little to address the paradigm gap between these communities in as well as outside developing countries.

Civil society participation in WSIS was significant, and some feel that it was both more cooperative and more assertive than in many previous summits. WSIS did illustrate, however, that civil society, like government, faces a paradigm gap between organisations interested in ICT/ICD (which participated in the summit) and mainstream development and rights agencies (which did not). Northern civil society was also more strongly represented than its Southern counterparts. Civil society's main gains lay in increased understanding and networking, but these were bought at a high cost and their sustainability is uncertain.

In some countries, civil society organisations also improved relationships with national governments, on which they may be able to build in future.

Finally, the WSIS texts strongly emphasised the value of multistakeholder participation and, though many governments remain uncomfortable about it, this will make future attempts to exclude civil society and the private sector more contentious. Experience with the Internet Governance Forum will be telling here: a successful Forum will advance the case for multistakeholder participation, but failure will be used against the principle.

In the coming period, APC will work with its partners and other organisations to build on the WSIS experience, as described in this report, in order to improve developing country and civil society participation in future international ICT decision-making. New fora like the Internet Governance Forum and long-standing institutions like the ITU will both play an important part in this work. There is still a great need for capacity-building which creates better understanding and develops new resources; for better networking and experience-sharing, particularly among and between developing countries; and for improved dialogue between different stakeholder communities. The WSIS experience has helped APC and other organisations to think through their own objectives and priorities in this area and to develop new initiatives. If this leads to more effective and more inclusive participation in the future, then that will be a positive and lasting outcome from this particular World Summit. ■

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with additional research by ABIODUN JAGUN

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Background

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The World Summit on the Information Society - WSIS in brief - was the major event in international discourse on information and communications technologies (ICTs) and their role in development during the first five years of the 21st century. Held in two preparatory phases, from 2001 to the first summit event in Geneva in December 2003, and from then until the second summit event in Tunis in November 2005, it preoccupied much of the time and many of the resources available for ICT and ICD (information and communications in development) issues in development agencies, government departments and civil society. While the long-term impact of WSIS on actual decision-making is as yet unclear, its final documents are likely to be cited for many years as representing a critical point in that evolution - much as the report of the 1984/5 Maitland Commission (formally the Independent Commission for World Wide Telecommunications Development), "The Missing Link", was cited at WSIS itself.

This report considers the participation of developing countries and non-governmental actors (principally civil society) in the WSIS experience - the Summit itself and its lengthy preparatory process - and in its two main subsidiary fora, the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms (TFFM) and the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG). It was commissioned by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), an international network of civil society organisations, to assess the impact of WSIS in the light of two earlier reports on developing country participation in international ICT decision-making: the "Louder Voices" report prepared for the G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force) in 2002 (summarised in chapter 2), and an initial study of African participation in the first phase of WSIS, commissioned by APC in 2004. The author of this report was closely involved in both of these studies.

This study is not intended as a comprehensive assessment of WSIS, though substantial attention is paid to WSIS' overall impact and outcomes in chapters 3, 4 and 5. Its main purposes are:

1. To observe and comment on the nature, content and extent of developing country and civil society participation in and impact on WSIS and its subsidiary fora.

2. To consider whether these are likely to have a lasting impact on international ICT decision-making processes.

3. To make recommendations to the WSIS follow-up process, to international organisations themselves, to governments, civil society and the private sector about ways in which international discourse can be made more inclusive of developing countries and non-governmental actors.

It is also not intended as a comprehensive study of civil society participation in the WSIS process as a whole. Civil society engagement with WSIS was widespread and diverse, and involved a variety of mechanisms, both traditional and innovative. While the report does give civil society experience considerable assessment, particularly in Chapter 7, the focus of this assessment is on the relationship between civil society and decision-making processes rather than the internal mechanisms of civil society engagement.

Research for the study was undertaken during the second phase of WSIS (from January 2004 to November 2005), and particularly during the six month period following the Tunis summit (November 2005 to May 2006). The report was drafted in May and June 2006, and published in March 2007. A summary, included as the Executive Summary to this report, was published at the first meeting of the Internet Governance Forum in November 2006.

Structure of the report

This report is organised as follows:

- **SECTION A** of the report sets the overall framework for the study, as follows:
  - CHAPTER 1 includes this introduction and an account of the methodology used in the study.
  - CHAPTER 2 summarises the findings of the "Louder Voices" report, which raised a series of questions concerning developing country and multistakeholder participation whose continued relevance is tested by the research.
  - CHAPTER 3 presents an overall account of the WSIS process, from the point at which a summit was first proposed at the Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union in 1998 to the publication of the final outcome documents of the Tunis summit session in November 2005.

- **SECTION B** of the report analyses the WSIS experience in the light of the research undertaken for the study.
  - CHAPTER 4 presents an overview assessment of WSIS and its associated fora from the perspective of organisational and institutional structure.
  - CHAPTER 5 presents a comparable assessment of the Summit process' impact on the four main thematic issues which it considered with any substance - the role of ICTs in development, the relationship between the information society[1] and human rights, financing mechanisms for ICT deployment, and Internet governance.
  - CHAPTERS 4 and 5 both review participation in general, by different stakeholder groups, within the WSIS structure and WSIS debates.
  - CHAPTER 6 looks in more depth at the involvement of developing countries in these discussions, in the light of the observations of the "Louder Voices" report, and suggests conclusions from these for the future.
  - CHAPTER 7 considers the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders, particularly civil society, and likewise suggests conclusions about their future engagement in international ICT issues.

- **SECTION C** (CHAPTER 8) of the report draws conclusions from the study and presents recommendations to inter-governmental, governmental, civil society and other stakeholders concerning future ICT/ICD issues and multistakeholder practice overall. It also puts forward specific recommendations concerning the WSIS follow-up process. These conclusions and recommendations, like the preceding analysis, are the responsibility of the author, and do not necessarily coincide with those of APC or its member-organisations.

Methodology

This study is the result of a prolonged period of assessment and analysis. Five principal methodologies were used during this period.

Firstly, the study draws on the personal involvement of the author and research partner, as participant observers, in the WSIS process, and that of APC personnel who played a significant role in WSIS civil society fora. In line with their responsibilities to this study, the author and research partner did not play any direct role in seeking to influence any part of the WSIS process, while the experience of APC personnel was more interventionist.

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1   There is debate about whether the term "information society" should be capitalised ("Information Society") or not. Those who favour capitalisation tend, on the whole, to grant more transforming power to the concept than those who do not. In this report, capitals have been used where the text explicitly refers to this grander vision (as it does in the name of WSIS itself); but not in the text as a whole.

Secondly, the study's desk research makes use of the extensive WSIS literature, particularly that available through the WSIS website[2] and documentation from other international and civil society organisations.

Thirdly, questionnaire and interview research was undertaken by the project research partner and APC colleagues during two fora of the second WSIS phase - the Africa regional meeting in Accra, Ghana and the second global preparatory committee meeting in Geneva, both held during February 2005. The author and research partner also conducted short interviews and informally discussed the issues concerned in the report with a wide range of participants during the third preparatory committee meeting of the second phase (in September 2005) and during the Tunis summit in November 2005.

Fourthly, the author conducted approximately forty hour-long interviews with key figures in the WSIS process, from all stakeholder groups, during the four month period after the conclusion of the Tunis summit (December 2005 to March 2006). These interviews included personnel within the organisation and political leadership of WSIS and its associated fora, from relevant UN and other international organisations, a number of bilateral national delegations and development agencies, civil society organisations, the private sector and the Internet community.

Finally, the study draws on a series of five case studies of experience in individual countries which were undertaken for the project by independent experts. These case studies - of Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ethiopia, India and Kenya - are summarised in written reports, copies of which are available online[3].

The terms "interviews" and "interviewees", where used in this report, refer to evidence derived from the whole of this diverse range of inputs – questionnaires and informal conversations, formal telephone interviews and contributions to case study research. All interviews, whether in person or by telephone, were conducted on the understanding that no comments would be attributed to any individual. This led to a very rich resource of comment and opinion, on which the report draws extensively. Some interviewees asked that the fact that they were interviewed for the project should not be made public. For this reason, a list of interviewees is not included in this report.

The author of the report would like to thank all those who have contributed to the study. In particular, he would like to thank Anriette Esterhuysen, Karen Banks and Willie Currie at APC, who commissioned the work and provided exemplary support throughout; Abiodun Jagun, whose supporting research work including compilation of Annex 4 added greatly to the enjoyability as well as the quality of the work; Lishan Adam, Valeria Betancourt, Rekha Jain and Partha Sarker, who undertook the country case studies; Alison Souter, who provided additional research support; and all of those who generously gave their time and their opinions during an exceptionally rewarding series of telephone and face-to-face interviews. As noted above, the conclusions and recommendations of the report - and any errors - are the responsibility of the author. ■

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2   www.itu.int/wsis

3   At rights.apc.org/documents/wsis_research

The *"Louder Voices"* report: a summary

This investigation of developing country and civil society participation in WSIS and associated processes follows the *"Louder Voices"* enquiry which was undertaken for the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the G8 DOT Force in 2002.[4] This chapter briefly summarises the conclusions of the *"Louder Voices"* report. These conclusions raised important research questions which lay at the heart of this project, and form the basis for part of the analysis in chapters 6 and 7.

The *"Louder Voices"* enquiry had four main objectives:

- To map international decision-making issues, processes and fora concerned with ICTs

- To assess the effectiveness of developing country participation in these fora

- To identify obstacles facing developing countries at the national, regional and global levels

- To recommend actions that could be taken by developing countries themselves, international organisations and the DOT Force implementation network to overcome these obstacles.

It focused on three major international ICT decision-making fora (the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)) and used a combination of interview evidence, case studies of six developing countries (Brazil, India, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia) and analysis of specific policy issues to draw conclusions about the state of developing country participation at that time.

The analysis set out in the *"Louder Voices"* report provides an important starting point for the present study. Although, like all international summits, WSIS represented a discontinuity in the normal pattern of international decision-making on the issues with which it was concerned, participants' engagement with it was predicated on their existing levels of involvement, expertise and priorities. This provides an opportunity for the present study to assess how the history of developing country and civil society participation (assessed in the *"Louder Voices"* report) affected participation in the WSIS process and the course that WSIS itself took; how WSIS adjusted to and altered constraints on participation, and what lasting impact WSIS may have on international ICT decision-making in future.

The Executive Summary of the *"Louder Voices"* report is summarised in the following paragraphs, in which italicised text represents direct quotation from the text of the report. The issues raised here are key matters for consideration in this investigation, and are reviewed in depth later in this report, particularly in Chapter 6.

1. Four key challenges were identified by the *"Louder Voices"* report:

   I. *First, most developing countries are members of established international organisations with ICT responsibilities, such as the ITU and WTO, and are usually represented at their meetings. However, there is not as yet an effective connection between the agendas of these organisations, their decisions, and the international development goals set out in the UN Millennium Declaration. … In spite of considerable effort, there is still a "missing link" between ICT and development at the international policy level.*

   II. *Second, developing countries have very little presence or influence in the many voluntary, private, and not-for-profit decision-making fora that have been set up in recent years to standardise and manage the Internet and other new ICTs. They have none at all in areas where standards are determined de facto by market power. Although the results of some of this work are fed into traditional international fora … it is clear that developing countries are increasingly excluded from international decision-making at the technical level.*

   III. *Third, the experience of many developed and some developing countries shows that technical and policy capacity go hand in hand, so that it is difficult to develop one without the other. Given present asymmetries in technical capacity, it is essential for developing countries to set priorities among international ICT issues and concentrate their limited resources on building technical and policy capacity in the areas that are most critical to their development goals.*

   IV. *Fourth, … effective participation is not limited to what happens before and during meetings. The goal of inclusion means that developing countries must assess the effect of decisions made by international ICT fora on their own development objectives….*

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4 Its report can be found at www.eldis.org/static/DOC10107.htm.

2. *There was consensus among those consulted for the [*"Louder Voices"*] study that it is not possible to strengthen participation by developing countries in international ICT decision-making fora without first strengthening their capacity to make and implement ICT policy at the national and regional levels.* Three critical aspects were identified within this national dimension of under-representation and ineffective participation:

    I. lack of policy awareness, at all levels of government and citizenship, of the potential role of ICTs in development;

    II. lack of technical and policy capacity on ICT issues, particularly in respect of emerging technologies and new policy areas - such as migration from circuit-switched to IP networks and indeed Internet issues in general;

    III. weaknesses in national and regional policymaking processes, including:

        i. lack of political leadership;

        ii. absence of national ICT strategies;

        iii. ineffective coordination between different government departments and agencies with ICT responsibilities;

        iv. lack of private sector and civil society participation in national decision-making;

        v. inadequate preparation for international meetings; and

        vi. ineffective use of financial and human resources.

3. *There was also consensus among those consulted for the [*"Louder Voices"*] study that action to strengthen the ICT policy capacity of developing countries must be accompanied by action to level the policy playing field so as to ensure that the needs of developing countries are on the agenda of international ICT fora and that they are included in decision-making processes.* Three critical aspects were, likewise, identified within this international dimension of under-representation and ineffective participation:

    I. lack of easy, affordable and timely access to information about ICT-related issues, decision-making fora and processes;

    II. logistical problems, including the frequency and location of international meetings and restrictions on participation (for example, by private sector and civil society experts);

    III. ineffective use of financial resources available to support participation.

4. A number of recommendations were made in the *"Louder Voices"* report aimed at addressing these deficiencies. In relation to the national dimension, developing country governments were recommended to:

    a. *improve information flows and policy coordination between different government departments and agencies with ICT responsibilities;*

    b. *promote informed public discussion and debate through both general and specialised media;*

    c. *include all relevant stakeholders in policy-making on an issue-by-issue basis;*

    d. *encourage participation of experts from the private sector and civil society in national delegations to international decision-making fora;*

    e. *share information, expertise and experience on a regional and sub-regional basis;*

    f. *implement knowledge management techniques to ensure that information gained through participation in international ICT decision-making fora is captured, disseminated to relevant stakeholders, and made accessible to other interested parties through the media; ... and*

    g. *review their current practices with respect to meeting preparation, delegate selection, participation, accountability and follow-up, with a view to ensuring that these ... result in the most effective use of financial resources through the optimum deployment of technical and policy capacity.*

5. International agencies, meanwhile, were recommended to:

    a. *promote awareness of the role that ICTs can (and can not) play in development by providing comprehensive, publicly-accessible, non-technical information on ... their activities; ...*

    b. *provide independent, authoritative technical/policy research and analysis of the major issues to be decided;*

    c. *diversify the location of meetings and ensure that their procedures allow all sources of developing country policy and technical capacity to participate in decision-making, whether they come from government, the private sector or not-for-profit organisations.*

These issues - concerning both developing countries and multistakeholder participation - are central to the investigation in this report. Chapters 6 and 7 review the conclusions of the *"Louder Voices"* report concerning developing countries and civil society, respectively, in the light of the evidence uncovered by the current investigation into the impact of the WSIS process. ■

WSIS: an account

WSIS was a world summit within the UN tradition of world summits - though with some distinctive features of its own. This section of the report gives a narrative account of the WSIS process and provides the foundation for the analysis that follows. It also summarises the content of the main outputs of the WSIS process, including WSIS' two interim fora, the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms (TFFM) and the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG).

WSIS TIMELINE 2001 – 2005

REGIONAL CONFERENCES

- African: Bamako (Mali), 25-30 May 2002
- Pan European: Bucharest (Romania), 7-9 November 2002
- Asia Pacific: Tokyo (Japan), 13-15 January 2003
- Latin America and the Caribbean: Bávaro (Dominican Rep.), 29-31 January 2003
- Western Asia: Beirut (Lebanon), 4-6 February 2003

PREPARATORY CONFERENCES (PREPCOMS)

- PrepCom 1, Geneva 1-5 July 2002
- PrepCom 2, Geneva 17-28 February 2003
- Intersessional, Paris 15-18 July 2003
- PrepCom 3, Geneva 15-26 September 2003
- PrepCom 3A, Geneva 10-14 November 2003
- PrepCom 3B, Geneva 5-6 and 9 December 2003

FIRST PHASE OF WSIS
Geneva, 10-12 December 2003

REGIONAL CONFERENCES

- Western Asia: Damascus (Syria), 22-23 November 2004
- Africa: Accra (Ghana), 2-4 February 2005
- Asia-Pacific: Tehran (Iran), 31 May-2 June 2005
- Latin America and the Caribbean: Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), 8-10 June 2005

SUBREGIONAL CONFERENCES

- II Bishkek-Moscow Regional Conference on the Information Society: 16-18 November 2004, Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan)
- Pan-Arab Conference on WSIS-Phase II: 8-10 May 2005, Cairo (Egypt)

PREPARATORY CONFERENCES (PREPCOMS)

- PrepCom 1, Hammamet (Tunisia) 24-26 June 2004
- PrepCom 2, Geneva 17-25 February 2005
- PrepCom 3: Geneva 19-30 September 2005 and Tunis (Tunisia) 13-15 November 2005

SECOND PHASE OF WSIS
Tunis, 16-18 November 2005

The nature of WSIS

WSIS' formal origins lie in a resolution, calling for "a world summit on the information society," presented by the government of Tunisia and passed without discussion during the final session of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)'s 1998 Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis. The objectives of the proposed summit would include:

- establishing an overall framework identifying, with the contribution of all partners, a joint and harmonised understanding of the information society;

- drawing up a strategic plan of action for concerted development of the information society by defining an agenda covering the objectives to be achieved and the resources to be mobilised;

- identifying the roles of the various partners to ensure smooth coordination of the establishment in practice of the information society in all Member States.[5]

This proposal was transmuted into an information society summit along conventional UN summit lines – probably much grander and more elaborate than participants in Minneapolis had envisaged - by the UN Administrative Committee on Coordination (now known as the UN Chief Executives Board), where it was enthusiastically received by a number of other UN agencies with wider development objectives, notably UNESCO. The General Assembly finally adopted a resolution endorsing WSIS as a formal summit in December 2001, by which time the Summit's momentum was well underway.

These slightly-clouded origins of WSIS raised a number of institutional issues which were to have implications for the future WSIS process, and which are discussed in Chapter 4. Potential rivalries between UN agencies over the management of WSIS were addressed by allocating responsibility for the organisation and administration of WSIS primarily to the ITU, supported by a High-Level Summit Organising Committee including the heads (in practice, the representatives) of some twenty United Nations agencies plus the World Bank and World Trade Organisation. An Executive Secretariat was established at the ITU in Geneva and staffed substantially through ITU personnel.

Two factors, here, were of particular significance. Firstly, there was, initially in particular, a tension between the primarily technological approach to the Summit espoused by the ITU, and the more developmental approach of UN agencies with wider developmental roles. Most interviewees who were engaged in this process felt that the wider UN family had successfully shifted the emphasis in WSIS' formal objectives from "the development of telecommunications"

(the historic role of the ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau) to the role of a wider range of information and communication technologies in social and economic development - or, to put it another way, from the "information society" as an outcome of telecommunications to the "information society" as a transforming social phenomenon.

Nevertheless, the fact that the ITU was the Summit's lead agency meant that invitations to participate were handled by ministries of communications (which deal with national relations with the ITU) rather than central planning ministries (as might have happened if the Summit had been led by the UNDP or another part of the central United Nations organisation) or ministries of information (which might have followed a UNESCO lead). This had a significant impact on participation in national delegations, which is discussed in Chapter 6. Though, as in most UN summits, negotiations were led by diplomats - usually those based in national missions to the United Nations - those diplomats were advised primarily by technical and technological specialists from the telecoms sector, who understood the ways of the ITU, rather than by mainstream development specialists. Many participants felt that this contributed to an emphasis on ICTs, particularly technologies, rather than on the information society in its wider sense, in many of WSIS' deliberations, and to some of the difficulties which WSIS advocates had in promoting its objectives within the mainstream development community. There were also tensions between the ITU and some other UN agencies, governments and non-governmental stakeholders who suspected it of using the Summit to try and establish a central governance role for itself towards the information society or the Internet.

There were two other distinctive features of WSIS in comparison with other UN summits.

The first was the decision to hold it in two parts - the first in Geneva in December 2003, the second in Tunis in November 2005. Whatever justifications were offered afterwards, this resulted from unwillingness within the UN system to choose between two competing offers to host the summit. Some advantages could be claimed for this arrangement - for example, a division of work between phases devoted to (a) principles and (b) implementation - and enthusiasts for WSIS made the most of these. Others cited disadvantages - the scope for deferment of decisions at the end of the first phase, a particular concern in such a rapidly moving development sector, and the increased cost for the UN system and all summit participants.

The second distinctive feature, cited by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his opening speech to the Geneva summit, was the topic under consideration: "This summit is unique," he said. "Where most global conferences focus

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5   Resolution 73 of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, 1998, available from: www.itu.int/wsis/docs/background/resolutions/73.html.

on global threats, this one will consider how best to use a new global asset."[6]

Although his speech actually dwelt on the "digital divide" (a problem) rather than on "digital opportunity", this remark raises a significant question about the efficacy of UN summits, in particular whether they are as useful in dealing with opportunities (particularly fast-moving ones or ones that have developed outside the established parameters of international governance) as they are in dealing with problems. This question is considered in Chapter 4.

Certainly, much of the second phase of the summit was concerned with specific problems, rather than opportunities – specifically, with the difficulty of financing ICT deployment and with the absence of traditional governance mechanisms for the Internet (the latter seen as a problem by many governments, but as a positive advantage by some other participants). However, the public ethos of WSIS was strongly positive about the perceived benefits of ICTs for development. It marked a highpoint - and, it may turn out (see Chapter 5), the beginning of a downturn - in the enthusiasm for ICTs as a, if not the, key instrument for economic and social development which had emerged within parts of the ICT professional and development communities during the preceding five years.[7]

Summit processes

World summits are complex and lengthy processes. While the media often give the impression that key decisions are taken at the actual summit meetings themselves, the final summit meetings are in reality little more than opportunities for heads of government to make formal commitments, in speech and signature, to agreements that have been reached during months of prior negotiations (though they also provide the opportunity to reach some form of consensus at the highest level on issues that have proved utterly intractable in negotiations). The WSIS process was perhaps more elaborate than most because of its two-phase structure.

The first summit phase

The first summit phase began with the establishment of a WSIS Executive Secretariat, within the ITU, in 2001. This secretariat, including ITU and other personnel, developed a preparatory process aimed at negotiating the Summit's output documents through a process of engagement, consultation and negotiation.

Both phases of the Summit – those leading up to Geneva in December 2003 and Tunis in November 2005 - were built around series of regional and global preparatory meetings. The first phase included five regional meetings, held as follows:

- African region, held in Mali, May 2002
- Pan-European region, held in Romania, November 2002
- Asia-Pacific region, held in Japan, January 2003
- Latin American and Caribbean region, held in the Dominican Republic, January 2003
- Western Asia [Middle East] region, held in Lebanon, 2003.

An assessment of the African regional conference is included in Chapter 6.

More important than these regional conferences, however, was the series of preparatory committees, or PrepComs, held in Geneva, which were the primary negotiating fora for the Summit texts: the space within which commitments were agreed and where contentious issues were disputed. Three PrepComs were scheduled: in July 2002, February 2003 and September 2003, though the third PrepCom had to be reconvened twice, in November 2003 and immediately before the Geneva summit meeting in December 2003, in order to deal with unresolved issues. An "intersessional meeting" and an "informal meeting on content and themes" were also held in Paris in July 2003 and Geneva in September 2003 respectively, in an attempt to expedite agreement.[8]

Within the negotiating process, a system of formal and informal caucuses brought together groups with common interests - whether governments (for example, in Africa), civil society advocates (for example, on gender issues) or loose issue-oriented associations (such as the Internet Governance caucus). Caucuses discussed and promoted draft text, seeking to incorporate their ideas and language into the documents under discussion at the inter-governmental level. They also coordinated lobbying on their issues of concern. Much of the effectiveness of participants in the summit as a whole depended on the skills and resources available to them for this caucusing activity.

These PrepComs were the primary arenas in which WSIS issues were contested. The first of them brought to the fore two critical issues which were to remain contentious throughout the first summit phase: the participation of non-governmental actors in the negotiating process, and the relationship between human rights, freedoms of information and expression and the information society. Indeed,

6   The Secretary-General's speech is at www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/coverage/statements/opening/annan.html.

7   This enthusiasm might be dated from the Kananaskis OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) summit in 2000, which launched the G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force or DOT Force.

8   Records of the first phase preparatory meetings can be accessed at www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory/index.html.

much of the time of the first two PrepComs was taken up not with issues of substance but with the question of who should have the right to take part in discussing them.

The key issue here was the nature of international decision-making. The United Nations and its family of agencies are inter-governmental in character, set up to enable governments to coordinate activities and resolve disputes amongst themselves, not to engage in debate with non-governmental entities. This inter-governmental character has been jealously guarded by many governments, particularly those of post-colonial countries which have seen equal participation in UN bodies as an important symbol of nationhood. Over the years, however, non-governmental organisations have gained some space within UN summit processes - initially through the UN's formal mechanism for civil society representation, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); latterly, in some cases, through more innovative means. Some UN agencies have paid substantial attention to civil society organisations in their own work, while others - including the ITU - have had to create increasing space for the private sector as it has taken on roles previously considered provinces of government.

The dispute over non-governmental representation was a continuous undercurrent throughout the WSIS process. Some governments, mostly from developing countries, were implacably opposed to any non-governmental agencies participating in or even being present during negotiations. Others, mostly industrialised countries, were either relaxed or positive about private sector and civil society involvement. Tensions frequently boiled over. Civil society and the private sector shared a common set of interests in representation, even though their views on content often differed, and were able to secure limited speaking rights. However, their more effective participation lay behind the scenes, in liaising with sympathetic official delegates and seeking to nuance debate in the directions that they favoured. In the event, there was significantly more multi-stakeholder participation in WSIS than in previous UN summits, and multistakeholder principles were supported in both Geneva and Tunis outcome documents.

Human rights and freedoms of expression were also contentious throughout the summit process. It has become conventional for UN summit declarations to reaffirm core principles derived from previous UN statements, including the freedom of expression principles set out in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Some governments have been unenthusiastic about this repetition of human rights language and its implications for summit declarations. This issue was more than usually significant in WSIS because of the obvious relationship between the information society, ICTs and freedoms of expression, and because of earlier UN debates about the meaning of a "right to communicate". A few governments (notably China's) sought to omit or constrain references to human

rights and freedoms of expression in the proposed summit texts while others (notably the European Union, the Nordic countries and Canada) sought to maintain them. In the event, human rights language was included in the Geneva texts, with some limiting references to national circumstances and cultures, while UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan emphasised in his opening speech that "the right to freedom of opinion and expression is fundamental to development, democracy and peace, and must remain a touchstone for our work ahead."[9]

The main development text of the Geneva output documents was formulated through an iterative process during the course of the first summit phase. The ITU invited governments to submit ideas about the role of ICTs in development, and these were incorporated in a draft text, which was then refined in negotiation. This process has its problems. Communications ministries were not necessarily the right agencies to put forward development issues, and not all of them discussed their input with development ministries. Geneva-based diplomats, too, lacked expertise in development issues, however skilled they might be at negotiating texts. While the texts that were negotiated could be seen as comprehensive in scope and were relatively uncontested in detail, they have been criticised, not least (in private) by many of those involved in their negotiation, for the following reasons:

a. That they are aspirational in tone, unprioritised and over-optimistic about the potential for ICTs to transform society

b. That they are focused on the supply of technology rather than demand-driven, grassroots development objectives

c. That they are insufficiently integrated with the UN system's key international development agreements - the Millennium Development Goals (which are referenced significantly in the Geneva texts) and the Monterrey Consensus on the overall development, trade and aid relationship – and with the outcome documents of other social summits.

While there was relatively little argument over aspirational text during the first summit negotiations, there was substantial argument over its implications, in particular where the allocation of development funds was concerned. Indeed, disputes over financing mechanisms almost prevented agreement being reached on draft texts before the opening session of the Geneva summit in December 2003.

The critical point of dispute here was a proposal for a Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF), a new UN fund specifically dedicated to financing ICT infrastructure and applications, which was put forward by the President of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade. This attracted extensive African and

9   www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/coverage/statements/opening/annan.html.

some other developing country support, reinforced perhaps by the fact that participation in WSIS delegations and the development of WSIS policies were led by communications ministries rather than those with broad responsibility for the allocation of national development resources (such as ministries of finance and economic planning).

Donor countries, however, were almost unanimously opposed to the DSF proposal. They were unconvinced that a new mechanism was either needed or desirable; indeed, it conflicted with their general view that ICTs should be mainstreamed within development (i.e. inserted into health, education, agriculture and other mainstream programmes) rather than treated as a sector in itself. They were unconvinced that development funds should be diverted into ICTs from other areas of development activity, particularly as demand for this was not coming from development ministries or apparent in either the Millennium Development Goals or the Poverty Reduction Strategies being negotiated by many Least Developed Countries. Finally, they were unconvinced that a new UN agency would spend resources in this area more effectively than the existing mechanisms which they supported, including their own bilateral programmes.

This dispute took the third PrepCom of the first summit phase to the brink, minutes from the close of negotiations. Only at the very last minute, at the insistence of the Swiss PrepCom chair, did the proponents of the DSF back down and agree to the establishment of a Task Force to investigate the need for such a fund rather than force a dispute in the summit itself over whether one should be established.

The other major dispute during the first summit phase - which became the major issue during the second phase - concerned the governance of the Internet.

The question of Internet governance has many facets, and was the subject of much misunderstanding during the WSIS period. One dimension of this was the fact that the Internet's emergence as a significant social and economic force had occurred outside the framework of traditional inter-governmental authority. Much of the Internet was and is ungoverned; much of what it is today was developed by those who were suspicious of government and capable of using Internet technologies to bypass any that might be imposed on it; much of the governance that does exist (managing resources such as domain names, developing protocols, etc.) is based on participative rather than inter-governmental models, very different from those within the UN system. Many people - including many in the Internet community itself, the private sector and industrial countries in particular - believe the Internet's dynamism to be dependent on this very lack of governance. Others, particularly developing country governments, have been wary of something highly unpredictable and uncontrolled and feel that it should be brought within the conventional governance

processes established by the UN system - processes which give governments authority and which, at least in theory, give weak governments and governments of smaller states an equal say with those that are more powerful or more secure. Many participants in the WSIS process also assumed, wrongly, that one Internet governance body, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), had far more wide-ranging powers to govern the Internet than are actually within its remit.

These issues were complicated by the history of the Internet, in particular its origins in the United States' military and academic community. As a result of this history, key Internet institutions (such as ICANN) and facilities (such as the root server system) were located in the US and, to many, appeared therefore to be subject to US control - an impression that was strengthened rather than weakened by US officials' unwillingness to recognise the basis for other governments' concern. The Bush administration's controversial interventions in international political and economic affairs – particularly, many interviewees observed, the Iraq war which began in March 2003 - helped to politicise this issue, making it, for some countries and participants, as much about the United States as about the Internet itself: it certainly provided a vehicle for anti-Americanism. As with financing mechanisms, Internet governance issues proved too intractable for resolution during the first phase of the summit and the final PrepCom agreed to defer them to a working group that would meet between the first and second summit phases.

Geneva summit output documents

Having negotiated these last-minute crises, the Geneva summit was held, amid an air of some relief, in December 2003. For many participants, particularly from civil society, the most important or useful dimension was the space that Geneva provided for networking, including a successful exhibition and meeting area known as the ICT for Development Platform.[10] This "summit fringe" is reviewed in Chapter 7 of this report.

The first phase of the summit ended with the publication of two core documents: the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Geneva Plan of Action. As implied above, these documents were the outcome of protracted negotiations during the first phase PrepComs, and only finally agreed, at a specially reconvened PrepCom, with minutes to spare before midnight on the day before the summit opened.

The **Declaration of Principles**[11] is an aspirational text which incorporates different, sometimes contradictory, visions

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10   See www.ict-4d.org/about.htm.

11   The Declaration of Principles is available from: www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=1161lo.

of the role of ICTs and the nature of an information society. Its oft-quoted opening words are these:

We, the representatives of the peoples of the world … declare our common desire and commitment to build 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 in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life.[12]

It places this aspirational vision - which does not refer directly in this opening to technology - within the context of established UN agreements, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the Millennium Declaration (which sets out the world community's targets for poverty reduction, the Millennium Development Goals or MDGs). The limits of ICTs' potential are acknowledged but within a highly positive endorsement of their role:

We are aware that ICTs should be regarded as tools and not as an end in themselves. Under favourable conditions, these technologies can be a powerful instrument, increasing productivity, generating economic growth, job creation and employability and improving the quality of life of all. They can also promote dialogue among people, nations and civilizations.[13]

The Declaration as a whole works through the implications of these aspirations in different areas of activity, each of which is subsequently developed in the associated Plan of Action.

Two significant operational or process principles were also adopted in the Declaration.

Firstly, the Declaration established a commitment to multistakeholder participation, which became known as the Geneva Principle:

We recognize that building an inclusive Information Society requires new forms of solidarity, partnership and cooperation among governments and other stakeholders, i.e. the private sector, civil society and international organizations. Realizing that the ambitious goal of this Declaration - bridging the digital divide and ensuring harmonious, fair and equitable development for all - will require strong commitment by all stakeholders, we call for digital solidarity, both at national and international levels.[14]

Secondly, the Declaration included a commitment to cooperative international action to achieve the principles contained within it, relate these to the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs) agreed by the UN General Assembly in 2000, and establish coherent follow-up mechanisms for the summit as a whole. This section of the Declaration included a compromise statement on the Digital Solidarity Fund issue which had almost broken the summit during its final PrepCom meeting, and which referred back to the Geneva Principle described above.

… while appreciating ongoing ICT cooperation through various mechanisms, we invite all stakeholders to commit to the "Digital Solidarity Agenda" set forth in the Plan of Action. We are convinced that the worldwide agreed objective is to contribute to bridge the digital divide, promote access to ICTs, create digital opportunities, and benefit from the potential offered by ICTs for development.[15]

The Declaration of Principles also invited the UN Secretary-General to set up a working group on Internet governance, one of the two key fora addressing highly controversial issues between the first and second phases of the summit.

The stated purpose of the **Geneva Plan of Action[16]** was to:

[translate] the common vision and guiding principles of the Declaration … into concrete action lines to advance the achievement of the internationally-agreed development goals, including those in the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Declaration and Plan of Implementation, by promoting the use of ICT-based products, networks, services and applications, and to help countries overcome the digital divide.[17]

It is notable that this first paragraph of the Plan of Action, unlike that of the Declaration of Principles, has an explicitly technological focus. Indeed, the Plan of Action as a whole refers predominantly to ICTs rather than the information society as its objective.

The Plan of Action sets out a number of "indicative targets [which] may serve as global references for improving connectivity and access in the use of ICTs, … to be achieved by 2015," the target date also set for the majority of the MDGs. These targets[18] (listed in the box below) set both technological and developmental goals, but these are less precise than those set in the MDGs - there is, for example, no definition of what level or quality of "connectivity" is implied, or of what, precisely, "access" means.

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12 Declaration of Principles, 2003, section A, article 1.

13 ibid., section A, article 9.

14 ibid., section A, article 17.

15 ibid., section B11, article 61.

16 The Plan of Action is available from: www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=1160l0.

17 Geneva Plan of Action, 2003, section A, article 1.

18 ibid., section B, article 6.

The Plan of Action then describes a series of action lines in the following areas, each building on principles set out in the Declaration:

1. The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development

2. Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for the Information Society

3. Access to information and knowledge

4. Capacity building

5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs (including such issues as privacy, information security and spam)

6. The enabling environment (both that required for effective deployment of ICTs and that potentially facilitated by ICTs)

7. ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life - with sections of text devoted to e-government, e-business, e-learning, e-health, e-employment, e-environment, e-agriculture and e-science

8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content

9. Media

10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society

11. International and regional cooperation.[19]

These action lines eventually formed the basis for the WSIS follow-up process agreed two years later in Tunis.

The text of much of the Plan of Action derived initially from suggestions submitted by governments to the ITU, text relating to which was developed and agreed in negotiating fora. The strength of this process is its inclusiveness, at least where those invited to participate are concerned. Its weakness is a lack of prioritisation and as a result (as is often the case with such documents) these Plan of Action sections tend to list aspirations rather than establishing the basis for an implementation programme. The section on capacity-building, for example, contains sixteen itemised points; that on the enabling environment eighteen.

In addition, much less attention was paid to the potential downsides of information technology, than to its opportunities: there are a few words only, for example, on spam; very little on the use of ICTs in cyber or conventional crime; nothing on the potential use of ICTs for government surveillance and control.

From the perspective of this study, two sections of the Plan of Action are particularly important, those elaborating on the multistakeholder process and on the international "solidarity"/policy development agenda.

The Plan of Action builds on the Declaration's Geneva Principle by allocating roles to stakeholders, as follows:

a. Governments have a leading role in developing and implementing comprehensive, forward looking and sustainable national e-strategies. The private sector and civil society, in dialogue with governments, have an important consultative role to play in devising national e-strategies.

b. The commitment of the private sector is important in developing and diffusing information and communication technologies (ICTs), for infrastructure, content and applications. The private sector is not only a market player but also plays a role in a wider sustainable development context.

c. The commitment and involvement of civil society is equally important in creating an equitable Information Society, and in implementing ICT-related initiatives for development.

d. International and regional institutions, including international financial institutions, have a key role in

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19 ibid., section C.

integrating the use of ICTs in the development process and making available necessary resources for building the Information Society and for the evaluation of the progress made.[20]

This statement of roles represents a compromise rather than a consensus - a form of words acceptable to those wishing to promote and those preferring to restrict multi-stakeholder participation in decision-making. Its implications are considered in Chapter 4.

The "Digital Solidarity Agenda" was also developed by the Plan of Action. Again, the text here represented a compromise between advocates of special funding for ICT/ICD activities (the proponents of the Digital Solidarity Fund) and donors concerned to mainstream ICTs in development rather than to give them special status. It announced the establishment of a Task Force on Financial Mechanisms, to work under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General; and set up procedures for the development of benchmarks of ICT activity, including "a composite ICT Development (Digital Opportunity) Index".[21]

The second summit phase - from Geneva, December 2003 to Tunis, November 2005

The outcome of the first phase of the summit might be summarised, therefore, as follows:

a. Broad principles were agreed, which might be taken as defining an international consensus on the information society. This was ambitious and aspirational in tone, with little implementation detail. With the exception of the "digital divide", it focused almost entirely on "digital opportunities" and paid little attention to major problems arising in the information and ICT sectors.

b. Compromise was reached on texts concerning contentious issues of human rights and freedoms of information and expression. However, these issues remained unresolved and continued to provide an undercurrent of dissension during the second phase, exacerbated by tensions over human rights and freedom of expression within its host country, Tunisia.

c. The two major issues of controversy during the first phase - financing mechanisms (and particularly the proposed Digital Solidarity Fund) and Internet governance - were referred to interim fora under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, with a remit to report back to the second phase of the summit through its preparatory process.

The preparatory process for the second phase of the summit followed the model set during the first. Once again, a series of regional meetings was held to enable prior discussion of issues at a "continental" level (though this time the European region did not bother with a regional event):[22]

- Western Asia (Syria, November 2004)

- Africa (Ghana, February 2005)

- Asia-Pacific (Iran, May/June 2005)

- Latin America and the Caribbean (Brazil, June 2005).

With the agenda focused on a small number of specific issues, the organisers also encouraged thematic rather than regional discussion.

Substantive negotiations again took place through a series of PrepComs, held in Hammamet, Tunisia in June 2004 and in Geneva in February and September 2005. This time, however, the work of the PrepComs was more structured, being built around the work of three smaller-scale fora which fed their work into the PrepCom system. These interim fora are described in the following sections.

Interim fora

The first and least known of these three fora was the **Group of Friends of the Chair**. This Group, made up of government representatives from six countries in each region plus regional coordinators and representatives of the ITU, the UN Secretary-General and the two host countries, was set up by the first PrepCom of the second phase with the remit of developing the documentary basis for negotiations during that phase. Its critical role lay in developing what was known as the "political chapeau", the basis of the ultimately agreed Tunis Commitment which set out the agreed ethos and vision of the WSIS project. Important issues of debate within this context included the status within the second phase of the text agreed in Geneva and the nature of the follow-up process to WSIS after Tunis.

Much more contentious, at least initially, were the two independent fora established by the UN Secretary-General, at the request of the Geneva phase of the summit, to resolve critical issues that could not be resolved in Geneva - the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms and the Working Group on Internet Governance. These interim fora played an important - in many ways crucial - role in the evolution of WSIS overall. Both, significantly, addressed *problems* - of infrastructure finance and of Internet governance - rather than the opportunities that Secretary-General Annan had represented as characterising the summit overall in his opening address in Geneva. They were, however, substantially different in the means they adopted to address these.

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20 ibid., section A, article 3.

21 ibid., section E, article 28.a.

22 Records of the second phase preparatory meetings
    can be accessed at www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory2/index.html.

The **Task Force on Financial Mechanisms (TFFM)** was the earlier of these independent fora to report. As noted above, intense argument had centred during the first phase of the summit around a proposal to establish a Digital Solidarity Fund which would focus international resources on the "digital divide". Donor countries strongly resisted the idea of establishing a new ICT-specific international fund, believing that development resources should be allocated within rather than outside the Monterrey Consensus, that existing resources for ICT investment were both sufficient and underutilised, and that a separate funding arrangement for ICTs was difficult to reconcile with their mainstreaming approach to ICD.

The remit of the TFFM, agreed in Geneva, reflected these priorities: the Task Force was to review the adequacy of existing financial mechanisms, and to propose "improvements and innovations of financing mechanisms" in the light of that review - including "the effectiveness, the feasibility and the creation of a voluntary Digital Solidarity Fund."[23]

The structure of the Task Force, unlike that of the parallel Working Group on Internet Governance (see below) was comparable with many similar UN task forces and working groups before it. Organised by the UNDP with support from other multilateral agencies, it met only twice, relying substantially on the work of consultants rather than engaging directly in analysis itself. Unlike WSIS, where delegations were led by diplomats and telecoms sector specialists, the Task Force had substantial representation from mainstream development sectors in both donor and developing countries, and this difference is evident from a report which is much more reflective of mainstream development thinking than the Geneva Declaration and Plan of Action. Membership of the Task Force is listed in Annex 2.

Its report[24] begins by noting both the innovation and the dynamism of the ICT sector, and its subsequent line of argument can be summarised as follows. Enabling ICT infrastructure to be deployed and enabling it to support development activity both depend heavily on the environment for innovation, investment, business development and service provision. In practice, infrastructure investment has moved from traditional public (government and multilateral agency) sources in the 1980s to the private sector in the 1990s, benefiting from deregulation of telecoms markets. Though Northern investment has fallen significantly since 1999, there has been an increase in Southern investment and in innovative multistakeholder partnerships - trends that should be encouraged as the investment requirements for broadband, in particular, greatly exceed the

capacity of governments and donors to invest. Less attention has been paid to applications development and capacity-building, and more investment is needed here - with more donor involvement - if the benefits of ICTs are to be fully realised.

Based on this analysis, the Task Force drew the following conclusions:

1. It recommended governments to maximise the attractiveness of their environments to private sector infrastructure investment, as the best way of securing resources to extend network access and service provision.

2. It recommended improvements to processes enabling ICD applications and initiatives, including greater pooling of requirements and experience-sharing.

3. It called for innovative approaches to finance investment in more difficult areas such as those which are geographically remote, and to meet new, more expensive but potentially productive challenges such as regional infrastructure and broadband network deployment.

4. It suggested a range of "improvements and innovations" to existing financing mechanisms, including better coordination of institutional funds, multistakeholder partnerships and more effective use of domestic finance.

The downgraded Digital Solidarity Fund won the barest of endorsements from a report which firmly emphasised "the context of available financing for the broader set of development agendas and goals,"[25] including the Monterrey Consensus and the Millennium Declaration, and the importance at a national level of incorporating ICD within Poverty Reduction Strategies and similar national development programmes.

The **Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG)** was more innovative in both membership and process than the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms. Chaired by the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser for WSIS, Nitin Desai, it brought together a wide range of people from government, private sector and civil society and included diverse Internet expertise. Civil society participants were chosen through a process of dialogue with civil society organisations, which submitted a list of suggested members almost all of whom were accepted. Membership (which is listed in Annex 2) was also geographically extensive and inclusive. However, WGIG members acted as individuals, not as representatives of any interest group, government or agency. They met four times in formal session, holding public sessions open to participation by all-comers and so enabling much more extensive engagement with their work by the private sector, civil society and the Internet community than is generally the case in comparable fora.

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23 Geneva Plan of Action, section D2, article 27.f.

24 The report of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms is available from: www.itu.int/wsis/documents/
doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=1372l1376l1425l1377.

25 TFFM report, 2004, section C2, p. 10.

WGIG members focused in teams on issues of particular interest to them, doing much of their work in online dialogue, supported by an expert secretariat. Participants in the WGIG interviewed for this report generally felt very positive about its processes and about their ability to participate – as, indeed, did interviewees on the margins who wanted to get their point of view across through the public sessions organised by the WGIG.

The remit given to the WGIG in the Geneva Plan of Action was that it should:

i.   develop a working definition of Internet governance;

ii.   identify the public policy issues that are relevant to Internet governance;

iii. develop a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of governments, existing intergovernmental and international organisations and other forums as well as the private sector and civil society from both developing and developed countries;

iv.   prepare a report on the results of this activity ... for the second phase of WSIS in Tunis in 2005.[26]

The WGIG report,[27] agreed in June 2005, succinctly responds to the first three of these objectives, with the more contentious material it might have contained relegated to a subsidiary "background report".[28] Internet governance is defined as follows:

> Internet governance is the development and application by Governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.[29]

This definition found its way into the Tunis Agenda, the final WSIS report.[30]

The WGIG divided public policy issues relevant to Internet governance into four categories:

a.   Issues relating to infrastructure and the management of critical Internet resources (such as the domain name and root server systems)

b.   Issues relating to the use of the Internet (such as spam, network security and cybercrime)

c.   Issues that are relevant to the Internet but have an impact which is much wider ... and for which existing organisations are responsible (such as intellectual property and international trade)

d.   Issues relating to the developmental aspects of Internet governance, in particular capacity-building in developing countries.[31]

The report commented on issues in categories b., c. and d., but its most important work concerned issues relating to infrastructure and the management of critical Internet resources - the issues that lay at the heart of the concerns raised during the first summit process, especially over the United States' role and responsibilities.

Although it attempted to divide roles and responsibilities between different stakeholders, the WGIG's lists of these are less clear-cut than the text later adopted in Tunis (see below). At the heart of its report, however, lie three principles derived from the Geneva Declaration of Principles, which formed the basis for much of the subsequent debate:

- No single Government should have a pre-eminent role in relation to international Internet governance.

- The organizational form for the governance function will be multilateral, transparent and democratic, with the full involvement of Governments, the private sector, civil society and international organisations.

- The organizational form for the governance function will involve all stakeholders and relevant intergovernmental and international organizations within their respective roles.[32]

Alongside these principles, the WGIG agreed that there were "two overarching prerequisites to enhance the legitimacy of Internet governance processes":

- The effective and meaningful participation of all stakeholders, especially from developing countries.

- The building of sufficient capacity in developing countries, in terms of knowledge and of human, financial and technical resources.[33]

The WGIG was not able to agree on a model for oversight of the Internet on this basis - the issue was too controversial - but it was able to put forward four alternative models as the basis for future discussion in WSIS itself. These were:

1.   A Global Internet Council, "anchored" in the United Nations, consisting of government representatives, which would take over the functions currently managed by ICANN, plus many of the policy and other responsibilities in categories b., c. and d. above (a model characterised in much media discussion as the UN taking over the Internet).

2.   No specific oversight organisation but perhaps an enhanced Governmental Advisory Committee in ICANN.

26 Geneva Plan of Action, section C6, article 13.

27 Available from: www.wgig.org/docs/WGIGREPORT.doc.

28 Available from: www.wgig.org/docs/BackgroundReport.doc.

29 WGIG report, section II, para. 10.

30 Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, article 34.

31 WGIG report, section III, para. 13.

32 ibid., section V, para. 48.

33 ibid., section V, para. 74.

3. An International Internet Council (independent of the UN) to perform the functions currently undertaken by ICANN and perhaps any other public policy functions that did not fall within the remits of other intergovernmental organisations.

4. A complex multiple governance model including a government-led Global Internet Policy Council, a private-sector-led replacement for ICANN (WICANN), and a Global Internet Governance Forum involving governments, the private sector and civil society on an equal footing.[34]

Finally, whatever oversight arrangements might emerge from WSIS, the WGIG proposed the creation of a "global multi-stakeholder forum to address Internet-related public policy issues."[35] As well as including non-governmental stakeholders, this would be more inclusive of developing countries. It would provide a space within which a wide range of Internet-related issues could be discussed and developed, but would not have decision-making powers. This proposal forms the basis for the Internet Governance Forum that was ultimately agreed in Tunis.

The second summit PrepComs and Tunis summit

The negotiating process for the second phase of the summit closely resembled that for the first, at least in methodology. Texts were negotiated in PrepComs by national delegations in which diplomats, particularly those from Geneva missions, tended to play the leading role. Diplomats aside, most national delegations continued to be dominated by communications ministries and telecoms sector specialists. Private sector and civil society representatives were still only allocated a marginal role in formal negotiations (but did have limited speaking rights), though both played significant roles in caucusing and developing texts outside the formal process, and gained networking value, too, as a result. Some interviewees suggested that the private sector was significantly more apparent during phase two than it had been during phase one.

There were, however, substantial differences in the way that the second phase was conducted. PrepCom 1, in June 2004, set the scene for the overall process and established the Group of Friends of the Chair. PrepCom 2, it was agreed in advance, would focus on financing mechanisms and PrepCom 3 on Internet governance. This sequencing of issues, built around the work of the three interim fora, had significant implications for the nature of the second phase debate. As the negotiating process continued, PrepComs divided much of their energies into two subcommittees - Subcommittee A dealing with Internet governance and

Subcommittee B with everything else before the Summit. PrepCom 3 needed to be reconvened twice, as the date of the Tunis summit drew near, to consider the remaining contentious issues concerning Internet governance and follow-up activities and, as in Geneva, final resolution of these was not reached until the last evening before the summit was due to begin.

One of the key issues at the start of the second phase was the determination of a number of countries that issues dealt with in the text of the Geneva documents should not be reopened - that the summit should move on, as the European Union put it, "from principles to action", rather than reverting to the disputes over rights, for example, that had been "resolved" in 2003. Once that principle was established, the second phase could focus on three main issues: financing mechanisms, Internet governance and the follow-up and implementation of WSIS output documents.

The text on general principles of ICD, within the political chapeau, was not particularly contentious, and these overall ICD issues were therefore relatively little discussed during the second phase. Among significant developments in this area in the long term may be efforts to establish benchmarks for measuring ICD activities, including the ITU's development of a (rather telecoms- and Internet-focused) Digital Opportunity Index. A stocktaking exercise, intended to assess progress in ICD developments since the Geneva meeting, provided little more than a list of initiatives reported to the WSIS secretariat, rather than a substantive basis for measuring action in the round.

As it happened, the second phase of the summit coincided with a review of the Millennium Development Goals held by the United Nations in September 2005, but the synergies between the two were few. ICTs featured little in the reviews of MDG issues by the Millennium Project and barely at all in the review of progress towards achieving MDGs in the UNDP's Human Development Report.[36] Little was said at the Millennium review summit itself about them, though a certain degree of interaction had been established in the Geneva documents, for example in making the terminal dates for WSIS targets consistent with the 2015 objectives of the Millennium Declaration.

The second PrepCom, in February 2005, focused on and effectively resolved the issues concerning financing mechanisms, at least so far as the WSIS process was concerned. Issues which had proved deeply divisive at the end of the first phase were barely raised again after that point. In effect, the PrepCom agreed the conclusions of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms, and no new mechanisms were established to finance ICT or ICD activities. The Digital

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34 ibid., section V, paras. 52-71.

35 ibid., section V, para. 40.

36 See the reports of the Millennium Project at www.unmillenniumproject.org/, and UNDP, *Human Development Report 2005 - International cooperation at a crossroads: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world*, at hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005.

Solidarity Fund became a small, voluntary body - established enough to avoid embarrassment but in a form and on a scale unlikely to have much impact on overall development activity. Critical to this outcome was an agreement reached during the African regional meeting, just before the second PrepCom, in which key multilateral agencies, including the World Bank and the European Commission, agreed to support regional infrastructure development in Africa - perhaps the first stage in a rethinking of the role of multilateral agencies in ICT infrastructure finance since donors and the international financial institutions effectively withdrew from this area in the early 1990s.

By far the most contested area of discussion during the second summit phase was that of Internet governance, which threatened - like the Digital Solidarity Fund during the Geneva phase - to prevent agreement being reached on a final set of outcome documents. Given the amount of time devoted to Internet governance, and the way in which international media covered WSIS 2 when it finally took place, the Tunis event looked and felt at times more like a world summit on Internet governance than on the information society.

The WGIG report was not received with the same air of consensus as that from the TFFM; indeed, some interviewees (who disagreed with the tone of the WGIG) questioned whether it had any impact at all on the subsequent debate. The United States was adamant that the WGIG report should not provide a basis for negotiation, though it was in practice discussed substantially by Subcommittee A. Overall, most interviewees believed, the WGIG report did have a significant impact. It provided perhaps the first clear definition of Internet governance and sorted some of the questions arising from the Internet into a coherent order - not necessarily one that everyone agreed with, but one that helped develop a common understanding and a common framework for negotiations. While its suggested models for Internet governance were not particularly influential, the politicised nature of the debate around oversight perhaps meant that no recommendations on this theme would have withstood negotiations. One of the most substantive outcomes of the summit on Internet governance, the creation of an Internet Governance Forum, can be seen as a direct outcome of a proposal made by the WGIG.

Negotiations in Subcommittee A of the remaining PrepComs were intense and fraught. A small number of large developing countries - some acting as a "like-minded" bloc - led the attack on the status quo, particularly perceived United States control of ICANN and the root server system. The United States and a group of supporting countries resisted. The European Union took a third line, widely seen as a break with the United States, built around "enhanced cooperation" of Internet governance processes. Civil society focused resources, not unsuccessfully, on seeking to secure, and then to broaden the remit and the scope for multistake-holder participation in the proposed Internet Governance Forum. It was difficult even for participants to see, at the end of the day, exactly who had won or lost what in this particular debate.

The final issue of contention was follow-up activity. Here again, industrial countries were anxious to avoid the creation of elaborate new institutions. The compromise reached was one that involved many UN agencies but left the question of control - and the potential for turf battles within the UN system - unresolved. As with the Internet Governance Forum, much will depend on what happens next.

The Tunis phase outputs

As with the Geneva phase of the summit, the Tunis phase generated two outcome documents, the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.

The Tunis Commitment[37] begins by reaffirming the content and positions taken in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, and restates the positive view of ICTs as an instrument of social and economic development - of "progress", its authors might have said - which is articulated at greater length in the Geneva Declaration of Principles. Also reaffirmed were the special commitments made to particular geopolitical and social groups (developing countries, small island states, women, young people, indigenous communities, etc.).

Language here was not uncontested: there was renewed discussion, for example, about the roles of different stakeholders; continued discussion about the nature of references to terrorism, cybercrime and the relationship between proprietary and open source software; strengthened language concerning child abuse. The digital solidarity agenda was placed squarely in the context of debt relief and trade reform as well as financial assistance. But, in essence, the Commitment is a restatement of the values and principles established in Geneva in briefer and more general terms.

The stated purpose of the Tunis Agenda[38] was to move from principles to action. It concentrates on the three core areas of focus for the summit's second phase: financing mechanisms, Internet governance and the follow-up and implementation of WSIS outcomes.

As noted above, the text on financing mechanisms was agreed by the end of PrepCom 2 and discussion on this was not reopened later in the Tunis phase. The text concerned was closely modelled on the conclusions of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms. It affirms the importance of ICT investment but in instrumental rather than aspirational

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37 Available from: www.itu.int/wsis/documents/
    doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=2266%7Co.

38 Available from: www.itu.int/wsis/documents/
    doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=2267%7Co.

terms. It places this investment firmly within the context of wider development investment and of agreed development instruments such as the Monterrey Consensus; suggests ways in which existing investment sources could be more effectively coordinated and/or used; urges, encourages and supports ways of helping, facilitating or enhancing outcomes rather than prescribing solutions. The Digital Solidarity Fund, so contentious in the Geneva phase, is welcomed in its new, residual form as "an innovative financial mechanism of a voluntary nature open to interested stakeholders."[39]

The text on financing mechanisms is, therefore, what might be described as a reformist text, which represents a consensus built around improvements to the status quo rather than radical new initiatives - and lacks the sense of urgency and priority for ICTs articulated in the Geneva Declaration and Tunis Commitment. Some key questions - in particular, those around strategic investment in areas such as broadband infrastructure - are raised but, effectively, referred back to pre-existing institutional fora: matters for the multilateral development banks, for bilateral and multilateral donors, for private sector investment and public-private partnerships, etc., rather than for special intervention, specialist summits or special Funds.

The second main section of the Tunis Agenda is concerned with Internet governance. It is less dependent on the WGIG than is the financing section on the TFFM, though the issues and options as set out by the WGIG played a major part in its creation. Its development, as noted above, was much the most contested area of discussion during the second summit phase; and the rather incoherent structure of the final text reflects the last-minute nature of the consensus that could be achieved.

It begins by adopting the WGIG definition of Internet governance:

> A working definition of Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.[40]

"The international management of the Internet," it adds,

> should be multilateral, transparent and democratic, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations. It should ensure an equitable distribution of resources, facilitate access for all and ensure a stable and secure functioning of the Internet, taking into account multilingualism.[41]

The inelegance of this second paragraph betrays its origins in textual compromise. Parts of the text on Internet governance were fought over word by word and phrase by phrase. That which was finally agreed recognised:

> that the existing arrangements for Internet governance have worked effectively to make the Internet the highly robust, dynamic and geographically diverse medium that it is today, with the private sector taking the lead in day-to-day operations, and with innovation and value creation at the edges.[42]

It recognised, too, the complexities of Internet governance, but was unable to resolve the political contradictions between key players in the PrepCom disputes. Signatories to the Agenda document, for example, were "convinced that there is a need to initiate, and reinforce, as appropriate, a transparent, democratic and multilateral process, with the participation of governments, private sector, civil society and international organizations, in their respective roles" - a statement built around ambiguity ("as appropriate", "in their respective roles") rather than agreement. "This process," it continued, "could envisage creation of a suitable framework or mechanisms, where justified, thus spurring the ongoing and active evolution of the current arrangements in order to synergise the efforts in this regard" (likewise note "where justified", "in this regard").[43]

The Agenda affirms that "Countries should not be involved in decisions regarding another country's country-code Top Level Domain (ccTLD),"[44] but does not resolve future arrangements for this. "Enhanced cooperation" is considered essential, including cooperation on "the development of globally-applicable principles on public policy issues associated with the coordination and management of critical Internet resources,"[45] but the mechanisms to develop this are deferred for consideration by those concerned, and by a forum to be established through the office of the UN Secretary-General (see below).

Although the section does not deal with the Internet in general or in principle, it does address some Internet policy issues outside the specific governance context. Developing country concern about high international connectivity costs is mentioned, for example, alongside a list of potentially ameliorative measures. There is also text on public policy issues such as cybercrime, spam and "abusive uses of ICTs".

From the perspective of this report, two issues are of crucial importance - the role and relationships of different stakeholders, and the future structure for Internet-related dialogue and decision-making.

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39 Tunis Agenda, article 28.

40 ibid., article 34.

41 ibid., article 29.

42 ibid., article 55.

43 ibid., article 61.

44 ibid., article 63.

45 ibid., article 70.

The roles of different stakeholders in Internet governance are defined as follows:

> ... the management of the Internet encompasses both technical and public policy issues and should involve all stakeholders and relevant inter-governmental and international organizations. In this respect it is recognised that:
>
> a. Policy authority for Internet-related public policy issues is the sovereign right of States. They have rights and responsibilities for international Internet-related public policy issues;
>
> b. The private sector has had, and should continue to have, an important role in the development of the Internet, both in the technical and economic fields;
>
> c. Civil society has also played an important role on Internet matters, especially at community level, and should continue to play such a role;
>
> d. Inter-governmental organizations have had, and should continue to have, a facilitating role in the coordination of Internet-related public policy issues;
>
> e. International organizations have also had and should continue to have an important role in the development of Internet-related technical standards and relevant policies.[46]

Inter-governmental organisations (though not governments) are explicitly encouraged "to ensure that all stakeholders, particularly from developing countries, have the opportunity to participate in policy decision-making relating to Internet governance, and to promote and facilitate such participation".[47]

Much of the argument about Internet governance during the latter stages of the second summit phase concerned the possible establishment of an Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and its potential remit. The final decision, as noted earlier, was to ask the UN Secretary-General to convene the first meeting of a Forum, which would then:

> Build on the existing structures of Internet governance, with special emphasis on the complementarity between all stakeholders involved in the process - governments, business entities, civil society and intergovernmental organizations.[48]

Given a wide remit, based on language some of which originated with civil society, the Forum was to develop its own processes and procedures, with a "lightweight and decentralised" management structure and an initial five-year term. However, it was to be a *discussion* forum:

> The IGF would have no oversight function and would not replace existing arrangements, mechanisms, institutions or organizations, but would involve them and take advantage of their expertise. It would be constituted as a neutral, non-duplicative and non-binding process. It would have no involvement in day-to-day or technical operations of the Internet.[49]

In short, the nature, role and influence of the Forum were left up for grabs. Its implications for future international policymaking are discussed in Chapter 8.

Thirdly, the Agenda document considers implementation and follow-up arrangements for the rest of WSIS' agenda issues. This area, too, was substantially debated and contested during second phase PrepComs, as different agencies jockeyed for position (or, in some cases, to avoid it). Much of the text in this section reaffirms the WSIS approach to and objectives for ICTs in development, placing it within the context of mainstream development activity and reiterating the stated importance of multistakeholder participation.

It is worth, firstly, looking to identify just what "commitments" are actually made in the WSIS outcome texts. In practice, even in the Tunis Commitment itself, use of the word "commitment" is relatively scarce. There are only a few places, in any of the texts, in which the summiteers formally commit themselves to undertake particular courses of action, rather than recognising perceived truths, affirming beliefs, recommending particular approaches or calling on governments and others to action in line with broad objectives.[50] The one place in which formal commitments do appear at length, and might be considered summarised, comes towards the end of the Tunis Agenda, and is set out in Annex 3. If the WSIS follow-up process is meant to monitor and encourage long-term outcomes, this comes as close as possible to a definition of what those outcomes might be.

No "new operational bodies" are required by the Agenda document for implementation or monitoring of WSIS outcomes, but there is significant jostling of institutional arrangements within the UN system. Instead of an overall WSIS review agency, the UN Secretary-General was asked to set up a UN Group on the Information Society within the framework of the UN Chief Executives Board (CEB), "with the mandate to facilitate the implementation of WSIS outcomes." The CEB should take into account, in developing this, "the experience of, and activities in the WSIS process undertaken by" the three agencies that might be likely to contest its leadership, the ITU, UNESCO and the UNDP.[51] ECOSOC was also asked to review WSIS outcomes in 2006, and consider possible changes to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. ■

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46 ibid., article 35.

47 ibid., article 52.

48 ibid., article 73.

49 ibid., article 77.

50 See list of commitments in Annex 3.

51 Tunis Agenda, article 103.

Analysis

CHAPTER 4

WSIS organisation and structure

Although in some ways not quite a conventional UN summit, WSIS has generally been perceived as falling within the long line of UN summits which have addressed major challenges to the international community over many years. This chapter of the report looks, firstly, at the structure of UN summits in general, and their appropriateness for consideration of ICT issues; then at some specific issues concerning the organisation of WSIS, and how these affected representation and other issues; and finally, suggests some interim conclusions about the implications of WSIS organisation and structure for future international ICT decision-making. It is not concerned with the participation of different actors, which is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

A summit for ICTs?

The possibility of a world summit on the information society was first proposed by the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference (to insiders, the "Plenipot") in 1998 and its organisation was led, on behalf of the United Nations, by the ITU.

The genesis of the Summit, briefly mentioned at the start of Chapter 3, is an interesting story in itself and has been generally misunderstood. The summit was not approved, as most participants assumed, from substantial debate within the "Plenipot" but through the adoption, without discussion, on the last day of the conference, of one among a number of proposals for which no time for debate had been found earlier in the meeting and which were not deemed contentious. The resolution itself was unclear about both the scope of the "information society" and the nature of the "world summit" it proposed.[1] However, those involved at the time say that they did not think it implied a UN-style summit of the kind that subsequently took place; one insider remembers most of those involved anticipating a relatively small gathering of sectoral experts and selected heads of state which could look at the issues and make recommendations, not least concerning the future

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1   The resolution is available from: www.itu.int/wsis/docs/background/
     resolutions/73.html.

of the ITU itself (a significant point of concern in the original resolution). Similar meetings had been organised by other UN specialist agencies on issues of concern to them but also of wider interest to others in the UN family. The ITU's experience with the Maitland Commission in 1984/5 may also have been in some people's minds as a precedent.[2]

However, the idea of a concentrated world dialogue on rapidly changing "information and communications" issues - which might take summit form - was not entirely new. As early as 1996, the European Commission organised a global Information Society and Development Conference in South Africa. A multistakeholder Global Knowledge Partnership was launched following international Global Knowledge Conferences in Toronto and Kuala Lumpur in 1997 and 2000, including UN agencies such as UNESCO and the UNDP. Other inter-governmental agencies, notably the World Bank, had begun revising their attitudes to information and knowledge issues during the late 1990s, developing strategies built around the concept of a "knowledge society". Within the UN family, UNESCO in particular was developing a proactive agenda on information and communication issues, though from a rather different - more developmental and cultural, less technocratic - perspective than the ITU. Information and communication technology was undoubtedly changing very rapidly, and the concepts of digital dividend and digital divide were increasingly debated in development as well as technological circles. The dot.com boom was underway; the dot.com bust was yet to happen.

Interviewees describe how the ITU's proposal for a "world summit", therefore, met with significant enthusiasm in principle in parts of the UN system and, just as importantly, with relatively little opposition. First the UN's Administrative Committee on Coordination, representing other UN agencies, endorsed the idea, and then the General Assembly, representing member-states, endorsed the proposal that it should become a full-scale summit, with all the authority and all the paraphernalia of preparatory committees and diplomatic negotiation that entails. Once the proposal for a summit of this kind emerges, it has momentum. Many interviewees from governments and international organisations described how, though they themselves were unenthusiastic, it was difficult for them or their governments/organisations to argue against a summit because that seemed to imply that the issue of the information society was unimportant. Nevertheless, they continue to wonder whether a smaller scale initiative might have been more effective in dealing with many of the issues concerned or in generating more dynamic outcomes.

UN-style summits have become relatively common in recent years - some years have seen several, perhaps partly as a result of this kind of "summit creep". Some have clearly been much more successful than others - the Rio conference on sustainable development in 1992 and the Beijing World Conference on Women of 1995 generally being cited as examples of success which other summits hope to emulate. The UN itself has developed considerable experience in the management of summits and (less successfully) the expectations they arouse.

Summits are, of course, extremely expensive instruments of international decision-making. They require large investments of money and, especially, time from government officials and subject experts over an extended period, which represents a considerable opportunity cost, especially for smaller governments and for non-governmental actors like those in civil society. They raise high expectations: if so much time and effort, and the political will of so many senior people from so many countries, are concentrated on a single decision-making forum, people expect it to achieve great things and are correspondingly disappointed if it reveals more difference than agreement between the parties. As a result, cynics suggest, whatever their outcomes, summits must always be described as either "successes" or "great successes".

However, summitry is merely one method of achieving (or at least seeking) international agreement. Most international policymaking is conducted in narrower, more formal, often rule-based organisations like the ITU and the World Trade Organisation; and is thought to be more expeditiously handled there because it takes place within groups that have specialist expertise. Summits are, in other words, rather like referendums: it only really makes sense to have them on issues that are of fundamental importance or that cannot be resolved through the conventional international governance mechanisms that already exist.

Insiders say that this is how they are generally considered within the UN system. What summits are best at doing is addressing broad problems that are of fundamental importance to the whole world community, where progress is not being achieved through conventional inter-governmental mechanisms, and where it seems possible that the dramatic gesture of heads of state and government collectively signing an agreement will inject a new dynamic into efforts to resolve that problem. Climate change is a classic example of the sort of issue for which summits have been thought appropriate.

Historically, the justification for summits has generally been that a particular issue has become so important that it requires the establishment of a new global consensus. The uniqueness of the summit format is that it can coerce world leaders into such a consensus. If large numbers of heads of state and government agree to gather together in one place to set out how they are going to resolve a

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2   The Maitland Commission was an "International Commission for World Wide Telecommunications Development", assembled by the ITU. Its report is available from: www.itu.int/osg/spu/sfo/missinglink/index.html.

global problem, the theory goes, it is too embarrassing for them to have nothing to sign at the end of their conference. This puts unique pressure on them to achieve agreement, and the object of the whole multi-year preparatory process is to refine issues to a point at which, often through last-minute crisis negotiations, an acceptable compromise consensus can be achieved. This may, in practice, be a lowest common denominator consensus, or it may be a substantive agreement which genuinely advances global action on an issue, but there is rarely total failure in the sense that there is no document to endorse. The trick at the heart of the summit exercise, as one insider described it, is to set a final date for signature where heads of state will be too embarrassed to leave without agreement, and to exploit the potential brinkmanship involved in this to make the maximum amount of progress on issues that have proved intractable.

Not everyone within the international system thought that the information society was susceptible to this kind of approach, for a number of reasons. One of these was in fact suggested by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan – though as a cause for celebration, not concern – in his opening remarks to the Geneva summit in December 2003. "This summit is unique," he said; "Where most global conferences focus on global threats, this one will consider how best to use a new global asset." But, the previous paragraph suggests, summits have been used for problems rather than opportunities for a reason. Problems concentrate minds on the choices between different ways of tackling them. Opportunities are far more open: there are far more ways that opportunities can be seized than problems can be tackled. When governments are asked how *problems* might be tackled, they will respond by excluding options, which makes it possible to narrow down choices for action. When they are asked how opportunities might be seized, they make lists which it is easiest for summit officials to combine in ever bigger lists, rather than to prioritise. Summits, in short, look less well suited to deal with opportunities than with problems, not least because there is nothing urgent enough to forge consensus at a global level between heads of state and government.

Other stakeholders tend to behave differently as well. Faced with global problems, private sector businesses tend to emphasise the difficulties involved in the solutions proffered (consider climate change, for an example); presented with opportunities, they are more likely to promote their products, as they did in WSIS' exhibition space. Problems focus civil society attention on a narrow range of issues; opportunities give them scope to show the full range of their diversity of interest and approach.

Many participants in WSIS, from all stakeholder groups, were concerned about its cost and cost-effectiveness, and about whether the global attention it achieved added as much value as could have been achieved through other less expensive fora or existing channels. How many telecentres, one interviewee put it, could you establish with the money spent on WSIS?; how many anti-retrovirals could you supply to those living with HIV and AIDS?

Interviews and other evidence suggest that the implications of this character of WSIS were seen in four ways during the event as a whole.

Firstly, WSIS was treated much more seriously by developing countries than by industrial countries. The number of heads of state and government attending the Geneva and Tunis sessions was relatively low, but delegations from industrial countries were particularly likely to be led by junior ministers or even civil servants rather than by the hoped-for heads of state and government. This would seem to stem logically from the "opportunity" rather than "problem" focus of the event. Industrial countries saw little value for them in discussing the development of the information society at home, and had less interest in discussing the information society in development than did developing countries. They only really became engaged in it where it impinged on international decisions that did affect them: for example, in the allocation of development funding or the management of a resource (the Internet) that they considered critical to their economies. Developing countries had a much stronger interest, at least within the plenaries where their representation was much more senior.

Secondly, the summit received much less attention from powerful centres *within* government than most other summits have achieved. National delegations were generally built around ministries of information and communication, supported by the Geneva UN missions of their countries. These were the obvious departments of government to deal with issues being handled by the ITU. However, ministries of information and communication are usually peripheral to the foci of power within governments: their ministers are not key ministers, their budgets are relatively small, their influence on presidents and ministers of finance is pretty weak. One presidential advisor interviewed for the project put it this way: "the ministry of communication saw WSIS as a way of building its prestige, and we didn't feel the issues involved were important enough for us [at the centre of government] to intervene, so we let them have their heads." The impact of this on the representation of developing countries is discussed in Chapter 6.

Thirdly, the summit's discussion of "digital opportunities", and the way this is reflected in its outcome documents, was discursive and poorly focused. The ITU's invitation to governments - and regional WSIS meetings - to submit their thoughts on opportunities which ICTs could address was essentially a list-making exercise, and this set something of a tone for negotiations on the content of output documents. The African WSIS bureau, the Bamako Bureau, for

example, set up after the Africa regional conference during the first summit phase, agreed 21 "priorities" for action. Debate about content of the output documents refined the texts proposed – debating points of disagreement (perhaps resolving them through ambiguity, perhaps deleting any that were too contentious), adding special references to particular groups (women, young people, the disabled, indigenous peoples) and particular issues. The Geneva Plan of Action essentially compiles the contributions received and discussed in this way, but does nothing to prioritise them - either by assessing their relative importance or by sequencing them for maximum effectiveness; nor does it discuss the limitations, difficulties, costs or potential conflicts between them. Certainly, it is hard to find anyone experienced in ICD that thinks the Plan of Action pushed the boundaries of thinking on the role of ICTs in development or the role of ICTs in social change – whatever it might have achieved in terms of awareness-raising.[3]

Fourthly, summit negotiations actually focused in practice not on these opportunities but on what were seen as problems - the issues of infrastructure finance and Internet governance; to a lesser extent, the conflict between national sovereignty and information rights; and, underlying these, "the problem of the digital divide". Thus, while much of the text of the Geneva Plan of Action is concerned with the potential role of ICTs in development, the negotiating process that accompanied it was preoccupied with the much narrower question of the desirability of a Digital Solidarity Fund to address disparities of investment resources for ICTs and ICD. The second summit phase saw almost no discussion of development or wider "information society" issues in principle, but was preoccupied almost in its entirety, first by resolution of the disagreements over infrastructure finance (PrepCom 2), then by the issue of Internet governance and the question of follow-up processes. Cynics in Tunis had a case for saying that the second phase was a summit not on the information society, but on Internet governance, and for questioning whether agreement on that was sufficiently important to ensure so much attention from so many people for so many years. Nevertheless, it was the ability of the summit process to achieve a consensus on Internet governance that ultimately enables it to be labelled a "success" today.

One further point is worth making about the subject matter for the summit. Four years is a long time for the international community to discuss any issue. It is a particularly long time to spend within a single process on a subject which is changing as rapidly as information and communication technology. Within the four year WSIS timescale, the number of Internet users worldwide at least doubled, reaching perhaps one billion;[4] teledensity in Uganda rose from 1% to 6%;[5] major new technologies were developed with the potential to transform future ICT deployment, while the cost of others plummeted. The ICT landscape of 2005 differed markedly from that of 2001. Yet, while the summit documents repeatedly refer to the dynamism of ICT markets, they themselves were remarkably undynamic. Where the "information society" itself and the role of ICTs in development are concerned, the texts agreed in 2005 show no significant change from those of 2003, which were themselves based on contributions put forward in 2001 and 2002. Some interviewees have suggested that – again, regardless of what it may have done in terms of awareness-raising – WSIS may have actually slowed rather than accelerated thinking and decision-making about these issues by focusing it around perceptions from a particular, receding moment in time.

Summit organisation: the role of the ITU

Six more specific organisational and structural issues concerning WSIS were consistently raised by respondents in interviews and questionnaires for this study. These were:

1. The role of the ITU as principal summit organiser, its relations with other UN agencies, and the implications of these for the summit as a whole

2. The division of WSIS into two phases

3. The role of regional meetings and preparatory committees

4. The role of the two interim fora, the TFFM and the WGIG

5. The follow-up process instituted for WSIS in the Tunis Agenda

6. The relationship between WSIS and other international decision-making fora on both ICTs and development.

Some of these issues are discussed in depth in other chapters of this report. Representational issues concerning the TFFM and the WGIG, for example, are considered in Chapter 7 and the follow-up process is addressed in Chapter 8. The following sections of this chapter therefore focus on the role of the ITU, the summit's two-phase structure, the role of regional meetings and preparatory committees, and the relationship of WSIS with other international decision-making fora. The first two of these distinguish the organisation of WSIS from other comparable summits, making it perhaps more appropriate to call it a "UN-style" summit than a UN summit per se.

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3   Some in civil society have argued that this is because civil society was effectively excluded from participation in the drafting of the Plan of Action. Others, however, point out that the WSIS document was less substantive than those emerging from other summits (from whose drafting civil society organisations were also absent); and that the absence of development-oriented civil society organisations from the summit preparatory process would have made it difficult for civil society to reflect the consensus of development (rather than ICT-focused) NGOs.

4   Approximate data derived from www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#.

5   Approximate data derived from www.ucc.co.ug/marketInfo/marketstatistics.php.

The role of the ITU

Although it largely fitted into the standard summit format, WSIS was not, as indicated earlier, an entirely conventional international summit and it is worth looking at some of the differences between it and other summits in this context. In particular, the organisation of WSIS was led by one of the UN specialist agencies, the ITU, rather than by the UN's central organisation.

The possibility of a world summit on the information society was, as noted earlier, proposed by the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in 1998, though it had been raised earlier in the 1990s in discussion within the UN system and among some civil society organisations. This resolution described the ITU as "the organisation best able to seek appropriate ways to provide for development of the telecommunication sector geared to economic, social and cultural development," and so to facilitate "the emergence of the concept of the information society in which telecommunications play a central role."[6] The idea of a World Summit grew through iterations with other parts of the UN family into an event of the type normally described as UN summits. The UN General Assembly gave the job of organising this now-grander summit to the ITU in January 2002.[7]

The character of any summit is, of course, likely to be substantially determined by its organisational structure. Interviewees for the project suggest that the decision to give the ITU the lead responsibility had five significant effects on the organisation of the Summit and thereby on its outcomes. Each of these has significance for this study.

Firstly, the lead role of the ITU implied a certain approach to the content of the Summit. The ITU is a technical agency, not just in the sense that it has a specialist issue to deal with, but in the sense that this issue is technological. ITU conferences, staff and study groups deal with highly technical issues like spectrum allocation, telecommunication standards and the regulation of interconnection rates. Even the ITU's development arm, the Telecommunication Development Bureau, is primarily concerned with "the development of telecommunications" rather than with "telecommunications in development". With the best will in the world, the ITU lacks expertise in wider policy areas such as human rights and mainstream development, and its personnel tend to see ICTs as technologies (or new technologies) rather than within the cultural framework of information and communications (which preoccupies UNESCO), the development policy framework (which concerns the UNDP and other UN specialist agencies) or the rights agenda (which preoccupies many civil society organisations). In practice, the ITU's management of WSIS

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6   ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 1998, resolution 73, available from: www.itu.int/wsis/docs/background/resolutions/73.html.

7   See UN General Assembly resolution 56/183, available from: www.itu.int/wsis/docs/background/resolutions/56_183_unga_2002.pdf.

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was also undertaken by the central secretariat of the Union, working to the Secretary-General. The ITU's Development Bureau played only a marginal role in the organisation and content of WSIS – something which seemed odd to outsiders, but less strange to those familiar with internal ITU politics.

Secondly, as noted earlier, the ITU's lead role in turn affected the composition of national delegations to WSIS. Because invitations to participate were issued by the ITU, they naturally found their way to the departments of government responsible for relations with the ITU – predominantly ministries of communications, information, information technology or (at their widest) commerce and industry. Aside from diplomatic personnel, participation in national delegations – which is discussed further in Chapter 6 – came predominantly, in most countries, from these departments of government, from the regulatory agencies associated with them, and from the telecommunications businesses owned or partly owned by them (mostly fixed telecoms operators). Mainstream development ministries were poorly represented at WSIS for a number of reasons, discussed in Chapter 6, but one of them was that invitations from the ITU only reached them if they were passed on by the ministries that received them – and those ministries tended to see the information society as their concern, or perhaps their opportunity.

So, thirdly, many felt, did the ITU. The last three decades have seen the ITU's role and authority over its traditional mandate greatly diminished. Liberalisation of telecommunications leaves much less scope for governments to make binding agreements; none, really, any longer for binding agreements between state-owned monopolies. As telecoms services have become openly traded and telecoms infrastructure has become more open to foreign investment, the inter-governmental dimension of telecommunications has become governed as much, in many ways, by the rules of the World Trade Organisation as by a specialist sectoral body like the ITU. Standardisation of technological development has also been dealt with more and more in recent decades by the private sector – which now leads work in this area within the ITU, since it extended the scope for private sector participation in the early 1990s. ITU pessimists recognise the risk of the Union diminishing to little more than a spectrum management agency – unless of course it finds a new and wider role.

For some within the ITU – member-states and permanent officials – the organisation of WSIS undoubtedly represented an opportunity to carve out that niche; to become for the information society, and perhaps the Internet, what the original International Telegraph Union was for the telegraph in 1865. For organisations to seek new fields of activity is, of course, entirely proper; whether they succeed depends on how far their aspirations chime with their existing stakeholders and with potential partners already

involved in areas they wish to address. In this case, the ITU's potential role was highly contentious. Not everyone within the ITU itself – again member-states and permanent officials - is convinced of the propriety of its extending its mandate into wider areas. Industrial country governments, for example, have been far less sympathetic to the ITU's evolving in this way than those of developing countries, for reasons discussed in Chapter 5. There is genuine and longstanding debate within the ITU about this question.

More importantly for the nature of WSIS, however, the ITU's potential expansion into areas of development and cultural policy was contested by the UN agencies most concerned with these areas. The nature of this contest was described by some of those involved as a "land grab" by one side or the other; and equally downplayed by others (on both sides). The key fact is that there were underlying tensions about expertise, roles and responsibilities. During the initial set-up period for the summit, there were continuing differences between the developmental visions of UNESCO, the UNDP and other development agencies within the UN family and what they saw as the technological determinism of the ITU. The compromise reached was that the ITU organised WSIS in partnership with other major agencies, through a High Level Summit Organising Committee able to advise the ITU on issues beyond its mandate. Nevertheless, inter-agency tensions remained evident throughout both phases of the summit right up to the discussions concerning WSIS follow-up, where they resulted in the unwieldy, multi-headed implementation structure which is discussed in Chapter 8.

Fourthly, although WSIS operated in the manner of a UN summit, it was never entirely one in the normal sense. As well as being managed by a specialist agency rather than the United Nations central organisation, it also received no funding from the central structure but had to raise its own. Insiders suggest that this was the primary reason why WSIS sessions were held over three days rather than five, putting more pressure on PrepComs to deliver a final text to the summit and allowing less scope for last-minute adjustments to be made by heads of state themselves.

The ITU's lead role also meant that the Summit was organised from Geneva rather than New York, which had tended to play the greater role in previous summits. UN insiders suggest that there are marked differences of character between the UN organisations in its two core homes – with New York emphasising the UN's political character and Geneva the role of specialist agencies; and with the political centre in New York having, at best, doubts about the organisational capacity of specialist agencies to handle what is a fundamentally political event. Cultural differences within the UN, they suggest, may have exacerbated tensions in the organisational process. Certainly, ITU insiders acknowledge that they found some WSIS issues – such as human rights – difficult to handle because they had no knowledge of them or their political nuances within their own experience. Input from the highly experienced former UN Under Secretary-General for economic and social affairs Nitin Desai, key organiser of many past summits, undoubtedly helped to facilitate organisational issues as the summit progressed.

One further point here is that, while all UN member-states have diplomatic missions in New York, a number of smaller countries do not have missions in Geneva. Their ability to play a role in WSIS may have been diminished by this. Unlike for example in the UN's political work and in the WTO, participation in ITU activities is usually led by country-based rather than mission-based personnel, and this may also have impacted on participation.

Fifthly, the ITU's lead role created some additional challenges in addressing the participation of non-governmental organisations, particularly civil society. Over decades, UN summits had gradually opened up some space for non-governmental stakeholders within their formal processes, though always within a framework in which governments retained sole responsibility for drafting and agreeing texts. This partial and gradual opening had been overseen by the UN's political process in New York, particularly ECOSOC, the Economic and Social Council, which has formal responsibility for liaison between the UN system and non-governmental actors.[8]

The ITU, however, has a different tradition. The changing nature of telecommunications in the 1980s and 1990s meant that the ITU had to be much more accommodating to private sector interests than other UN specialist agencies, going so far as to enable them to become "Sector Members" and to play a full (even a leading) role in some ITU activities (especially concerning standards), even if formal decision-making power remained with governments (as some governments remain determined to assert at every opportunity). On the other hand, the ITU established no comparable status to offer "civil society". Civil society organisations cannot (at least easily) play any formal part in ITU activities, such as study groups, or be accredited to ITU conferences. This exclusion was challenged with some, but not great, enthusiasm by some civil society NGOs in the later 1990s, and remained in place when the management role for WSIS was formally handed to the ITU in January 2002.

Interviewees had different interpretations of how this affected the participation of civil society in WSIS. Some argued that the ITU's lack of understanding of civil society organisations and concerns made it harder for these to gain ground, particularly when hardline anti-civil society national delegations sought to maintain ITU-style purity within the WSIS structure. However, as Chapter 7 shows,

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8   The UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service also supports civil society understanding of and engagement with the UN system.

the fact is that civil society participation in WSIS was significantly greater than that in any previous summit. An alternative interpretation, therefore, is that the ITU's inexperience and lack of processes for handling civil society may actually have facilitated the latter's participation. Without arrangements of its own to handle civil society involvement, the ITU, in this interpretation, needed to work through a specialist civil society bureau within the WSIS secretariat whose very existence normalised a much greater degree of civil society participation in WSIS than might otherwise have happened. Certainly, the ITU tended to leave a good deal of the responsibility for developing civil society input to this bureau. Chapter 7 explores this question further.

A two-phase summit

The second organisational aspect of WSIS to be considered at this point is its unique division into two summit phases, the first culminating in the Geneva Summit of December 2003, the second in the Tunis Summit of November 2005. Publicly, this two-phase structure was justified as enabling the first phase to concentrate on principles and the second on implementation. In fact, as everyone knew, it resulted from the UN's failure to choose between two competing bids to host the summit, one from the home of the ITU, the other from the government which proposed the original "Plenipot" resolution calling for a summit.

Few participants interviewed were convinced of the merits of the two-phase approach. Most – even those enthusiastic about WSIS overall – were concerned about the additional high cost of participation, both financially and in the time of expert personnel. They found it hard to persuade themselves that a two-phase approach had sufficient value to justify doubling this expense. On the whole, in spite of rhetoric, it seems unlikely that the United Nations would choose to repeat this way of doing things.

The central question here is one of whether, whatever the origins of the two-phase structure, its public justification did in fact occur: whether the principles developed during the first summit phase and outlined in the Geneva outcome documents were translated into action in the second phase. In fact, as described in Chapter 3, this did not happen. The principles agreed in Geneva were not, in the first place, particularly incisive or coherent; they certainly did not amount to a comprehensive, prioritised plan of action, nor did they have any structures through which implementation could be coordinated or monitored. In spite of prior agreement not to do so, a few countries did try, early in the second phase, to reopen points of principle – for example concerning human rights – but without success. Industrial countries, in particular, were adamant that the second phase should not cover the same ground as the first. But, interviewees tended to agree, the establishment of principles on rights and development issues

in phase one led not to debate about implementation in phase two but to the absence of debate about those issues. Disputes over the "WSIS follow-up" process were, in effect, debates about an implementation process which should happen after WSIS, not during its second phase. Language on development in the Tunis Agenda added nothing to that in the Geneva Plan of Action – and, indeed, the "action lines" listed in the Geneva Plan became the basis for implementation planning after Tunis. A couple of initiatives by the ITU – a stocktaking exercise and the publication of a Golden Book of WSIS-related initiatives – were more concerned with advocacy for ICD than with implementation planning.

What the second phase did, in practice, was provide a framework for the resolution of the two main outstanding issues from the first – i.e. infrastructure finance and Internet governance. However, few interviewees felt that resolution of these issues necessitated a second summit phase, rather than alternative processes built around either new or existing spaces for debate. Similar unresolved problems from other summits have been handed on to smaller, focused fora along the lines of the WGIG and the TFFM without being referred back to global summits. For many participants from industrial countries, in particular, the second phase became a prolonged exercise in what they saw as damage limitation, ensuring that changes were not made to the compromise principles established in the first phase, and seeking to avoid what would be, for them, unacceptable conclusions to negotiations on the two outstanding issues.

Regional meetings and preparatory committees

The third structural issue worth considering is the role of regional meetings and preparatory committees.

This structure forms part of the package of summit organisation. It is, essentially, how UN summits are done. Input from regional gatherings – and perhaps thematic meetings – is assembled by the coordinating central organisation. Documents resulting from this input are put before preparatory committees, whose role it is to develop texts for agreement, ultimately, by heads of state and government. Debate focuses around the wording of texts: wording that is unacceptable to some parties is gradually displaced, when those parties insist, by wording which is acceptable to all – either because it represents a genuine consensus or because, through ambiguity, it glosses over differences. Experts in drafting international agreements, from diplomatic missions, play the key role in this process which usually requires many iterations over the course of the preparatory period. Preparatory committees are there fore the locus for intense lobbying by interested stakeholders; though, when the final summit takes place, the media tend

to give and the general public to receive the impression that the whole agreement was put together by heads of state and government in the course of a single week or less.

It is fairly obvious that the quality of any final agreement here is going to depend on the quality of inputs (whether from regional meetings or elsewhere), the quality of drafting expertise and the extent of political will to reach agreement. Few interviewees for this report had much experience of summits other than WSIS but those that had did not suggest that the experience in WSIS was very much different, in terms of quality, from that elsewhere. Interviewees experienced in ICT policymaking, however, did have some concerns. Two points are, at least, worth consideration.

Firstly, regional meetings varied substantially in character and outputs. Some involved extensive civil society participation – as in Africa; others were much more formal and government-focused, like those in the Asia/Pacific region. Some made substantive contributions; others had relatively little to offer (such as the European meeting during the first phase; none was held in Europe during the second). Their contributions to the central secretariat therefore varied in content, style and quality; and there were significant clashes between inputs from different regional meetings which the central secretariat found it difficult to resolve. Some of those involved felt that this was not the best way to begin writing texts which ought to be coherent and comprehensive approaches to the issues under consideration.

As for preparatory committees, a great deal of time was wasted during those for WSIS on issues that were not substantive in terms of content. The first PrepCom of the first phase was almost entirely occupied with procedural matters: in particular, who should be allowed to take part in what? When issues of substance were discussed, most observers with ICT experience found debates frustrating – with a good deal of misinformation about issues and a good deal of political posturing getting in the way of the more substantive and better informed discussion they experienced at fora which had decisions of immediate importance to take. (Those involved in both tended to comment that they found debates at ITU meetings and conferences frustrating, too, but less frustrating than they found those at WSIS.) PrepComs were much more dynamic and focused when issues became politically contentious, as in the disputes over financing mechanisms and Internet governance. The quality of PrepCom management here, which is to some degree a matter of chance, could be of great significance. Many interviewees, for example, felt that a positive outcome to the discussions on Internet governance in Subcommittee A of the second phase PrepComs had been possible to a large degree as a result of the way in which that subcommittee was chaired (by the Pakistani ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Masood Khan).

WSIS and the wider world

The final structural issue worth consideration here is the relationship between WSIS and other international decision-making fora, both other international summits and mainstream international ICT decision-making bodies.

The year 2005 saw not just the second phase of WSIS but also a United Nations summit session devoted to reviewing progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The outcome documents from the first phase of WSIS were clear that ICTs had, potentially, a major role to play in facilitating achievement of the MDGs: "Our challenge," in the words of the preamble to the Geneva Declaration of Principles, "is to harness the potential of information and communication technology to promote the development goals of the Millennium Declaration."[9] A good deal of discussion had been undertaken, within WSIS, the UN ICT Task Force and elsewhere, about the contribution which ICTs could make to individual MDGs, while MDG target 18 itself calls on governments and inter-governmental organisations, "in cooperation with the private sector, [to] make available the benefits of new technologies - especially information and communications technologies."[10] Yet this input was barely visible in the global development discourse that took place in the Millennium Review Summit.

This lack of relation between WSIS and mainstream development fora is discussed in more depth in Chapter 5. It was not just a problem of content, however, but of structure. No significant structural links were established between the two events, which would have enabled an interchange of views or integration of proposals. The conjunction of a global summit which emphasised the role of ICTs in development with a global summit which largely ignored their relevance to development's key goals suggests that WSIS was never properly integrated with the international system as a whole and in particular that it failed to address the "paradigm gap" between ICTs and development which is discussed in Chapter 5. It also raises questions about whether the same lack of interaction would have been experienced if WSIS had been organised by an agency at the heart, rather than on the periphery, of the UN system.

Much the same level of disconnection can be seen between WSIS and other international ICT decision-making fora, with the obvious exception of Internet governance. Certainly where the Internet is concerned, WSIS debates and follow-up fora are likely to have a lasting impact on the future – one which is discussed further in Chapter 5. They may also have some impact on the future structure of the ITU. The 2006 World Telecommunication Development Conference – which sets the ITU Development Bureau's

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9   Geneva Declaration of Principles, article 2.

10 See www.un.org/millenniumgoals/#.

programme for the next four years – discussed the WSIS outcomes in depth; and the opportunities presented by WSIS follow-up for the ITU were also a significant issue at its 2006 Plenipotentiary Conference. But there are many, many dimensions of international ICT decision-making that WSIS barely touched. It is hard to see that it will have much on the 2007 ITU World Radiocommunication Conference, which will deal with crucial questions of spectrum management; or on the implementation of the WTO's Basic Telecommunications Agreement, which sets the framework for international investment and liberalisation in telecoms markets. As things stand, few interviewees could point to non-Internet areas of international ICT decision-making like these in which they expected the WSIS outcomes to have an influential impact.

Conclusions

What does this analysis of WSIS' structure and its implications imply for developing countries and for civil society? It may seem pointless, after the event, to consider whether a world summit such as WSIS was the best way to address "information society" issues, but there is a point in looking at whether the experience suggests any lessons for the future. Many of the implications are discussed in more detail in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, but a few suggested conclusions about structure are worth making here, particularly in regard to developing country and civil society participation.

Firstly, the WSIS experience raises questions about the value of summitry per se. As noted earlier, summits are hard to argue against. By their existence, they state that the international community views their subject as important, as a priority. Suggesting that a particular summit proposal should not be pursued is easily misrepresented as implying that the issue it concerns is not important. In the case of WSIS, lack of public dissent from the proposal for the summit was accompanied by extensive private disquiet about its appropriateness and value amongst international officials involved in its organisation, within the private sector, in many governments (especially in industrial countries) and in a good many civil society organisations. The key question, this suggests, should not be whether an issue is important enough to merit a summit, but whether the outcomes from a summit are likely to be sufficiently more valuable than those that could be achieved otherwise to justify the high costs involved in time and money. It is, in other words, about "horses and courses"; the biggest is not necessarily the best for the job in hand.

Secondly, the WSIS experience reminds us that summits are highly political. This, in turn, means that the issues they discuss - often complex technical issues (such as Internet governance or global warming) – enter into an arena of political argument in which actors adopt positions which are determined not by the issues themselves but by other issues of the moment. The merits of different approaches to (say) Internet governance can be caught up in the backwash of international conflicts (such as Israel/ Palestine or the war in Iraq) or the brokering of deals in unrelated international negotiations (such as the Doha round of trade talks). While summits are therefore intended for use on critical issues that require common action to which heads of state in general affirm consent, this politicisation means that such deals are not necessarily based on the subject under discussion alone. Where there is widespread misunderstanding or divergence of opinion about the nature of the subject under discussion – as with Internet governance – that can be an alarming prospect.

The WSIS experience suggests, in other words, that summits are not necessarily the most effective way of reaching agreement on international problems. Recourse to them should not be automatic, particularly given the expense involved. All stakeholders – governments, international organisations and civil society organisations among them – should assess the cost-effectiveness of summitry before commitment. The aims of a summit process should also be clear in advance. In the case of WSIS, many participants felt that there was insufficient clarity about a number of key factors: the scope and substance of the core question (the "information society"); the management structure for the summit (particularly the two-phase format); the role and responsibilities of different stakeholders concerned. Clarification of these issues in advance might have made WSIS more effective or more decisive; or it might have suggested that alternative forms of international discourse would have been more fruitful. As it was, in the words of one insider, the first phase of WSIS spent a great deal of time circling issues whose meaning was unclear rather than addressing real points on which agreement might achieve results.

A key question here for the "information society" is the pace of change. Information and communication technologies change rapidly. So does our understanding of their implications and applications. And so does our experience of actual use (consider, for example, the unexpected but dynamic adoption of the World Wide Web, mobile telephony or SMS). Even a two-year summit process here is problematic. What is known at the start of 2001 may be very different from what is understood at the end of 2003, yet final texts tend to be based on early drafts. How much more is this a problem when summit processes extend for four years?

For those who are primarily concerned with ICTs, fore, including civil society organisations, it is suggested that the key question in determining methodologies for international decision-making should be outcome-focused. What will be most likely to achieve agreement?; to achieve agreement which genuinely includes the concerns of a wide range of stakeholders?; to achieve agreement which is

likely to prove lasting and has the flexibility needed to allow continued development in an age of rapid and uncertain technological change? Alternative ways of reaching agreement to those currently established may be helpful here or not. Existing channels have set precedents, often because they have proved effective, though this does not mean to say that they remain so, or that they could not be improved (for example, through greater inclusiveness). New models, such as those developed in the Internet community, may also have much to offer. The important thing is what will work. In the case of WSIS, many organisations participated in it with low expectations because it was the biggest show in town and they could not afford to miss it; but the opportunity costs were substantial. It was a disruptive event but did not, for them, live up to its promise.

There is also the question of international representation. One of the reasons why summits are more favoured by developing countries than industrial countries is that they go some way towards redressing the balance of power within the international community. Developing countries feel that they have more influence in summits than in the UN's or specialist agencies' normal decision-making processes. There may well be truth in this, at least at plenary stages, and the question is discussed in more depth in Chapter 6. However, the use of summits to bypass the balance of power in conventional decision-making does not really address the underlying problems that developing countries have concerning representation – their lack of influence in those conventional decision-making processes themselves. After all, it is these conventional processes that will have responsibility for implementing summit decisions. The relative degree of influence exercised by developing countries in summits depends, of course, on a variety of factors – not least the degree of cohesion in developing country participation. Nevertheless, the weaknesses in WSIS' structure and in its outcome documents do nothing to suggest that less attention should be paid to the conclusions that the "Louder Voices" study reached in 2002. ▪

WSIS and its issues

The World Summit on the Information Society meant different things to different people. Prima facie, from its title, it might have been expected to address the broad range of changes taking place within society as a result of information technology. These are taking place in all societies, industrial as well as developing, albeit in different ways and to different degrees. In practice, the Summit focused on a relatively narrow selection of issues - the relationship between ICTs and fundamental rights, that between ICTs and development, infrastructure finance and Internet governance - and paid little or no attention to many others that it might have considered, such as the impact of information technology on the relationship between state and citizen (censorship, the "surveillance state") or the role of ICTs in national and international conflict. Much more attention was paid to ICTs in developing countries and to relations between industrial and developing countries (infrastructure finance, Internet governance) than to the social, economic and cultural changes resulting from the rapid evolution of ICTs and their deployment in industrial countries (whose governments were much less positive about the value of a summit in the first place and so chose not to raise issues of domestic significance within it). Far more attention was paid to the potential value of ICTs than to the challenges and risks they pose. At most, therefore, it would be fair to say that WSIS was a summit on aspects of the information society rather than on the information society as a whole.

The concept of an "information society" is itself contentious - and the "information society" as such is never clearly defined within the WSIS outcome documents, beyond the definition of "a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society," at the start of the Geneva Declaration, as one where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[11]

It would have been interesting to see what answers different stakeholders would have given if asked what they meant by the term. The underlying concept might perhaps be summarised as a society in which the exchange of information (i.e. communication) becomes the primary activity that determines economic prosperity and governs people's lives. An information society, in this sense, can be taken as implying the opening of a new phase in human development, one which is as important as the Agrarian Revolution that separated hunter-gatherer from agricultural societies, and the Industrial Revolution that marked the rapid growth of disparities between industrial and agricultural societies in the 18th and 19th centuries. The term was used in this sense of "progress" by some interviewees, particularly advocates of ICT, i.e. those who see the information society as a positive development and, often, as an opportunity to overcome the social and international disparities following industrialisation in a new economic paradigm. For others, its meaning was much narrower, referring to specific changes within society rather than to the transformation of society as a whole. Interviewees for this project therefore had widely different interpretations of the term, and many recognised its uncertain nature. They also had different interpretations of its scope and that of ICTs – concerning the extent, for example, to which they include broadcasting. The same degree of uncertainty was very likely true of participants in WSIS as a whole.

In practice, four issues dominated discussion in the WSIS process, each of them concerned with a different set of interactions between ICTs and other aspects of society and economy and each of particular concern to a different set of actors. These issues were:

1. The issue of information and communication rights and their relation to the fundamental rights expressed in other UN declarations

2. The relationship between ICTs and development

3. The financing requirements of ICT deployment (both infrastructure and applications)

4. The governance of one specific ICT, the Internet.

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11   Geneva Declaration of Principles, article 1.

This chapter considers each of these in turn, reviewing participation in them by developing countries and civil society, and their impact on the longer-term development of international ICT decision-making.

Human rights and the information society

Issues concerning human rights differed significantly between the first and second phases of WSIS. During the first phase, they were principally concerned with the nature of the WSIS texts' commitment to existing human rights standards, in particular reaffirmation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of commitments to gender equity and other fundamental principles. During the second phase, the main human rights issues revolved around the venue for the second summit meeting and conflicts – not least within civil society, as constituted within WSIS – about how this should be handled.

The first phase arguments about textual reaffirmation, at heart, concern what rights are accepted as fundamental by the international community and what issues relating to rights – or what nuances of those rights – need to be spelled out in more detail or with more specificity. This is not the place for a substantial discussion of international human rights agreements. It is, perhaps, though, worth noting a couple of points which had specific relevance to WSIS.

Firstly, the reaffirmation of certain core texts in new inter-governmental agreements, particularly the Universal Declaration, is essentially a question of the value and significance of maintaining a common global set of standards or aspirations. The concept of universal human rights, which sees them as inherent to all, has an ambiguous place in international discourse. Declarations of universal rights and of equality are rarely challenged in principle, but commonly rejected or ignored in practice, either because they conflict with cultural norms or because they conflict with the perceived authority or wishes of governments. While almost all governments would therefore claim to endorse fundamental rights agreements such as the Universal Declaration, and the outcomes of subsequent inter-governmental processes like the Beijing Declaration following the 1995 World Conference on Women or the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child, implementation in practice is very far from universal, and many governments feel uncomfortable with parts of these core documents. Not explicitly reaffirming them in new international agreements potentially dilutes their significance, without overtly challenging the principles that they contain.

In principle, this question of reaffirmation is no different for human rights declarations than it is for the documents spelling out the agreed international consensus (or compromise) on development policy – i.e. the Millennium Development Goals and the Monterrey Convention. However, in WSIS as elsewhere, these statements of development principles have not been subject to the same reaffirmation doubt.

In the case of WSIS, the reaffirmation question was complicated by the fact that the issue under discussion – the information society – potentially extends the impact which fundamental rights may have on society and alters the relationship between the government and citizen. New ICTs such as the Internet obviously have potential to give greater reach to freedoms of expression than they had before: more people can potentially communicate, share ideas and organise collectively than previously. This represents an increase in freedom of association as well as of expression. Content which is restricted or forbidden within national jurisdictions becomes more readily accessible, including content which national governments (and perhaps also majority opinion) considers morally or politically reprehensible. Rights to information and to communication, while implicit in established freedoms of expression, therefore carry additional nuances. Governments which restrict freedoms of expression in the first place are wary of their extension, either in the form of rights to information and communication or through the impact of new technologies.

In practice, of course, new technologies also offer governments new opportunities to observe and control citizens' behaviour, yet this potential was virtually unconsidered in any WSIS forum, including (with some exceptions) civil society. The long-term impact of information technology on the balance of relations between the state and citizen remains unclear: will the "information society" be one that empowers individuals or governments, the liberation of knowledge or the surveillance state? Fifty years from now, it may well seem odd to those reflecting on it that a World Summit on the Information Society spent so much time discussing the domain name and root server systems and so little on major transformations in the relationships between people and their governments.

During the second phase of WSIS, the issue of information and communication rights took on a more immediate and more "real life" character because the second summit was to be held in Tunisia, a country with what is generally considered a poor human rights record, including a record of obstructing access to Internet sites critical of the government and of suppressing free expression of dissent. Not all governments were happy about the choice of Tunisia, but the issue had most impact on civil society. Some international civil society organisations (CSOs) took the opportunity to denounce the Tunisian authorities; most expressed solidarity with Tunisian organisations that were harassed and excluded from participation in the WSIS process.

Their campaigns, however, were complicated by the presence within WSIS, from the Geneva summit onwards, of Tunisian NGOs supportive of their government – organisations which were not regarded as "real" NGOs by most international civil society organisations, but which nevertheless had

rights to register and participate as such. They became particularly active during the first PrepCom of the second phase, held in Hammamet (in Tunisia) in June 2004. Other civil society participants felt their involvement there was aimed at removing critical references to Tunisia from civil society input and sought to exploit concerns about issues such as transparency and representativity in ways that fostered North-South divisions within the civil society group. It was well-organised and disruptive, both organisationally and politically. It dominated civil society discussion in the Hammamet PrepCom, preventing strategisation around other issues, and continued to be problematic throughout the second phase. In particular, it hampered civil society efforts to explore other human rights issues.

During the second summit itself, some international CSOs worked closely with excluded Tunisian NGOs, including attempts to organise alternative events outside the summit site. These initiatives were largely prevented by the Tunisian authorities.

The impact of this "Tunisia factor" on civil society within WSIS is considered further in Chapter 7. Interviews suggest that it was regarded as something of an embarrassment by WSIS organisers that the second summit was held in a country where freedom of expression was substantially curtailed. To some extent, they suggest, this may reflect naïveté on the part of the ITU, especially, at the time that summit venues were selected. With no experience in human rights issues, the ITU simply did not anticipate that the summit would focus substantially on rights issues or that the selection of Tunisia would prove problematic. Most participants outside civil society, however, when asked, did not seem particularly aware of the problems being faced by Tunisian NGOs or the difficulties this posed for civil society as a whole.

Issues to do with human rights and, in particular, freedoms of expression were an important part of the WSIS debate. However, the two principal areas in which they arose were essentially ones in which human rights advocates defended established positions – the affirmation of fundamental statements of human rights, and the rights of Tunisian civil society organisations to participate effectively in their own country and in WSIS itself. Many other rights issues were raised to some extent within the context of the WSIS outcome texts. Much of the discussion around these concerned the inclusion of specific references to particular rights issues within the information society context - either reaffirmations of existing principles or clear statements of their applicability in a new dimension of social and economic life. It is difficult to find much in the texts which can be seen as an extension of human rights principles, but equally hard to find anything that might diminish them. As noted above, the global impact of new ICTs and of an "information society" on the relationship between the state and citizen received little attention in the WSIS process as a whole. In the long term, this omission is probably the most remarkable feature of WSIS' attention to human rights.

ICTs and development

Most observers now seem to expect summits to focus on development issues, in particular to provide a forum for resolving differences between industrial and developing countries. They expect them to interrogate development questions, looking in particular at development which is not occurring rather than developments which are. Thus, although the "information society" is not inherently either about developing countries alone or about relations between them and industrial countries (where the most rapid changes associated with an information society are to be found), most interviewees for this project expected, from the start, that the summit would place development at the heart of its agenda. This expectation was increased by the interventions of UNESCO and other development-focused agencies during the initiation phase of WSIS, when they sought to dilute the technocratic emphasis they felt the ITU was giving it, and to increase its social and economic content.

The WSIS outcome documents convey no sense that the role of ICTs in development is or has been any way contested. The Tunis Commitment, for example, refers to "a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the benefits that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can bring to humanity and the manner in which they can transform people's activities, interaction and lives, and thus increase confidence in the future."[12] In fact, however, the view that ICTs have a major part to play in development in general is neither old nor uncontested. This needs some context.

It is, first, relatively new. The much-cited Maitland Commission, which called for action to increase teledensity in developing countries in the mid-1980s, had little discernable impact on international development thinking. International financial institutions (IFIs) withdrew from lending for telecommunications infrastructure in the early 1990s because they felt this could and should be funded by the private sector. Until at least the mid-1990s, the consensus in development agencies was that ICTs, including telephony but perhaps excluding broadcast radio, were luxuries of benefit to the wealthy and irrelevant to poverty reduction. This view only began to change in the late 1990s, notably around the time of the first Global Knowledge Conference in 1997. The idea that ICTs are powerful instruments of development is therefore recent.

Nor is it universally held. ICTs do not feature prominently in the key instruments of international development policy – the Monterrey Consensus, the Millennium Development

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12   Tunis Commitment, article 5.

Goals (MDGs) and the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) and other agreements reached between national governments and donors. The MDGs focus on the reduction of income and non-income poverty, and set targets for improvements in basic indicators of the quality of life (such as health, education and gender equity) rather than the use of particular assets (such as bicycles, radios or phones). Only MDG target 18 mentions ICTs, and does so in the context of a goal that gathers up a few other issues rather than giving them priority.[13] Neither the reports of the Millennium Project orchestrated by the UN nor the Human Development Report published by the UNDP in 2005 to review progress on the MDGs pays much attention to ICTs; the latter almost none. PRS documents developed by the governments of developing countries, in association with the World Bank and donor countries, also pay little attention to them. As noted in Chapter 4, there was little interaction between WSIS and the Millennium Review Summit, also held in 2005, and WSIS' debates and outcomes had little impact on its conclusions.

This dichotomy reflects what is increasingly being seen as a significant paradigm gap between ICT/ICD advocates, on the one hand, and many mainstream development specialists, on the other. Its roots lie in the fact that few mainstream development specialists have much experience of the potential and limitations of ICTs, and remain sceptical about their viability within their spheres of action, certainly in achieving the very substantial gains put forward by advocates of new technology; while ICT specialists in general have limited understanding of poverty issues or the constraints posed by limited human resources, intermittent electric power and conservative behaviour patterns in limiting the impact new technologies have on social and economic life. The former suspect what they regard as technological determinism in the latter – the idea that technologies necessarily imply progress and that, because a technology can do something, it necessarily will. The latter suspect the former of conservatism, in particular of unwillingness to try new methods of doing things in the face of intractable problems. Most donors have responded to this paradigm gap by mainstreaming ICTs, in effect supporting ICT use in development programmes only where it contributes to established mainstream objectives (such as the MDGs and the national development planning goals set out in PRS).

Little of this paradigm gap is evident in the WSIS outcome documents. The Geneva Declaration does acknowledge that ICTs should not be considered panaceas: "We are aware that ICTs should be regarded as tools and not as an end in themselves," it says, adding that:

Under favourable conditions [emphasis added], these technologies can be a powerful instrument, increasing productivity, generating economic growth, job creation and employability and improving the quality of life of all. They can also promote dialogue among people, nations and civilizations.[14]

However, the surrounding text reflects the conviction of advocates rather than the concerns of sceptics. Of course, WSIS did not set out to address this paradigm gap. It was initially convened, and then overwhelmingly attended, by those already convinced of the merits of ICTs in development. Although they had different approaches to their developmental role (and to the importance of technology per se), the different agencies contesting oversight of WSIS – the ITU, UNESCO, etc. – all did so from a pro-ICD perspective. The overall ethos of WSIS from the start was one that advocated ICD, which placed it firmly on one side of the gap and, some mainstream development sector interviewees suggested, undermined interest in it as an event that might also attract the interest of sceptics.

Some interviewees for this study whose experience crosses the boundaries between ICD and mainstream development – including people based in both ICD and mainstream agencies - feel that a major opportunity was lost here. They suggest, in effect, that by treating WSIS as an opportunity to assert that ICTs were the future for development, ICD advocates missed the opportunity to put their case for this to mainstream development agencies; and also missed the opportunity to learn sufficient about mainstream development concerns to make their own assessments more focused on these priorities. A world summit on the information society, their argument runs, should have been an opportunity for different perceptions of the role of ICTs in development to be discussed in depth, and for a closer common understanding of them to be reached. The fact that WSIS' outcomes were largely ignored in the Millennium Review shows that it did little or nothing to enhance that common understanding. The lack of any marked new enthusiasm for ICTs in development in multilateral and bilateral agencies since WSIS or for participation in WSIS follow-up – and the reduction in interest apparent in some bilateral agencies – adds to this sense of opportunity lost. If accurate, this is obviously a serious failing in WSIS as an instrument of international policy, particularly if, as discussed below, reduction of interest on the part of donors was accompanied by greater awareness/interest on the part of developing country governments.

It is worth looking at this question from two particular angles: that of participation in the WSIS events, and that of the Geneva and Tunis outcome documents.

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13   Target 18 commits governments, "in cooperation with the private sector, [to] make available the benefits of new technologies - especially information and communications technologies." See www.un.org/millenniumgoals/#.

14   Geneva Declaration of Principles, article 9.

Participation in WSIS varied, but focused strongly on those with a strong ICT background. This was particularly true in the preparatory committees, while there was more diversity of participation (or at least attendance) in the plenary summit sessions:

- Inter-governmental agencies within the UN family participated, more or less in accordance with the extent of their engagement in ICD: UNESCO, the UNDP, the World Bank and its associated infoDev having a larger presence, but agencies such as the FAO and the WHO also showing their ICD wares in exhibition spaces. Enthusiasm for participation varied here: many of those interviewed within these agencies felt that it was necessary for them to be present, but that the primary value from being there would be derived from networking rather than the conclusions of the summit itself.

- Industrial country delegations were led, mostly, by diplomats and by commercial and industrial departments of government responsible for the ICT sector. Representatives from donor agencies within these governments tended to play a subordinate role, often (they felt) very subordinate – their prime objective being not to promote ICTs in development but to prevent commitments being made which went beyond their own assessments of them. They were less visible during the second phase of WSIS than the first, at least after its second PrepCom had effectively resolved the issue of infrastructure finance. Discussion with such donor agency representatives suggests that they were, on the whole, less convinced of WSIS' merits than their colleagues from multilateral agencies.

- Developing country delegations were also generally led by diplomats and by representatives of the telecommunications establishment (ministries of communications, communications regulators, fixed network operators). With some exceptions, few governments included mainstream development ministries in their delegations. However, enthusiasm for WSIS and for its role in promoting ICTs in development was much stronger among these delegates than their peers from industrial countries. Their participation is explored further in Chapter 6.

- Private sector engagement was primarily directed through the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI), which brought together international business representative bodies under the leadership of the International Chamber of Commerce. Participation in private sector engagement with WSIS focused on businesses with particular interests in the supply of ICTs (such as equipment manufacturers) rather than its users (such as the financial services sector). ICT businesses also took the opportunity of the summit exhibition spaces to market their goods and services. More comment on private sector engagement can be found in Chapter 7.

- Civil society participation also focused on agencies with a particular interest in ICTs – whether from a rights or an ICD perspective. Mainstream development NGOs – which are often particularly sceptical about the value of ICTs for meeting grassroots needs - were mostly absent, and did not contribute to civil society input into WSIS. Mainstream rights CSOs were also not particularly active. Civil society participation is the primary focus of Chapter 7.

In summary, the record of participation – as seen in list of participants to PrepComs and summit meetings themselves and as discussed with participants from all stakeholder groups – tends to confirm the view that WSIS was more a meeting of ICT specialists than a meeting of minds between such specialists and the wider development community.

That view also tends to be confirmed by a review of the Geneva and Tunis outcome documents. Both of these, as noted above, strongly endorse the role of ICTs in future development. A key section of the Geneva Plan of Action lists a number of application areas in which ICTs are expected to play such a critical role, prefacing each with the letter "e" (which, incidentally, is significantly disliked – perhaps seen as appropriation - in mainstream development communities): "e-government", "e-business", "e-learning", "e-health", "e-employment", "e-environment", "e-agriculture", "e-science".[15] The detail, however, that accompanies these is poorly structured and has clearly been agreed by negotiation rather than analysis, derived from submissions by ICT rather than sectoral specialists. That on "e-agriculture" illustrates the point - here it is in full:

a. Ensure the systematic dissemination of information using ICTs on agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry and food, in order to provide ready access to comprehensive, up-to-date and detailed knowledge and information, particularly in rural areas.

b. Public-private partnerships should seek to maximize the use of ICTs as an instrument to improve production (quantity and quality).[16]

Much of the text is also written from a supply- or technology-led perspective, starting from what ICTs can do rather than from the development challenges (poverty, illiteracy, HIV/AIDS, lack of clean water, etc.) that are central to the MDGs and therefore all mainstream development activity.

Almost all those with a development background who were interviewed for this project felt that these texts were a poor reflection of the substantial thought which has gone into defining the information society and its relation to development over the past decade, including the four years of WSIS itself. Organisations as varied as the World Bank,

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15 Geneva Plan of Action, section C7, articles 14-22.

16 ibid., article 21.

the Canadian International Development Research Centre, the Global Knowledge Partnership and a variety of non-governmental organisations have generated far more sophisticated and coherent analyses of the potential of ICTs, the "knowledge society" and related concepts than anything in the WSIS outcome documents.[17] The latter, by comparison, provide a poorly argued case; one that is only weakly rooted in the overarching development and poverty challenges, and which, today, many already think has an outdated feel. There is a strong sense of disappointment amongst development-oriented interviewees for this study that the outcome of a global summit on these issues should be so much less substantial, developmental or forward-looking than work which, it is felt, could have informed it much more effectively.

This WSIS text in fact betrays its origins. To populate the WSIS draft documents, the ITU asked governments, other stakeholders and regional preparatory conferences for two kinds of input: for their views on issues for inclusion, and for examples of success stories within their own territories. The former found their way into the draft outcome documents, the latter into a "WSIS stocktaking" exercise. The quality and nature of input from regional meetings was also variable. Perhaps this approach stemmed from the perception that WSIS was about an opportunity rather than a problem. It failed, however, to raise questions and challenges about the role of ICTs in development, or to encourage debate about their potential and limitations, either within contributing governments/countries/organisations or within the WSIS process.

How do participants feel that WSIS has affected perceptions of ICT and development issues among the different stakeholders? Opinion varies. As might be expected from the above analysis, while some delegates were supportive of the advocacy approach to ICD within WSIS, others were concerned that it lacked depth and discouraged engagement with other, less committed stakeholder groups. Certainly, few felt that WSIS did anything to foster innovative thinking about ICTs in development. While innovative thinking was going on while WSIS took place – indeed, the four years concerned saw a burgeoning literature of increasing diversity and quality, much of it available in the summit exhibition areas and/or presented in the informal discussion sessions surrounding the summit – hardly any of this trickled through to PrepComs or to plenaries. The WSIS outcome documents are not being displayed by ICD proponents as authoritative statements of the role of ICTs in development because they do not have sufficient credibility to play this role, either within or outside the ICD community.

There is, however, general agreement among interviewees that WSIS did foster much greater awareness of the potential of new technologies, particularly within developing countries (or at least amongst ICT-related decision-makers). This, they feel, was not a result of the WSIS texts or the negotiating process around them, but of the opportunity WSIS presented for people to meet, network and share experience. For some, this value came from prolonged engagement with particular issues during the PrepCom process. (Some civil society organisations, for example, report increased interest in their ICD activities and advice from developing country governments.) For more, particularly in civil society, it focused on the informal summit that surrounded each of the two plenary sessions – the combination of exhibition space, including a great deal of space devoted to development agency experience (especially in Geneva), and a wide range of panel discussions and presentations, the quality and sophistication of which greatly exceeded those in the summit's formal space. Some delegates, as well as observers, also indulged extensively in the opportunities afforded by the informal summit. While most participants would therefore have gained little knowledge from the formal sessions, many gained a good deal from the informal summit, and reported that this would influence them in ongoing debate and policy development at home. They felt the same would be true of colleagues.

It will be interesting to see how this increased level of awareness might be built on in the future. On the whole, WSIS received scant attention in the media anywhere. Press interest in the first summit was limited, and journalists were more attentive there to press conferences by heads of state that promised news about issues other than the summit itself. In the second phase, press interest was almost entirely confined to Internet governance (very often poorly understood, and sometimes along apocalyptic lines (such as "24 hours to save the Internet")). ICTs and development did not feature in the media, which did not therefore generally provide a means for the awareness-raising experienced by delegates to trickle down to general populations (or indeed to many in the wider development community).

A separate impact may be seen in the decision-making processes of developing countries themselves. Most interviewees agreed that the whole WSIS experience did raise awareness of ICTs within developing country governments. Many of those that had not participated in DOT Force-era enthusiasm for ICT/ICD caught a whiff of that era's sense of excitement about their potential. Many of those who had participated in it had their enthusiasm reinforced by the pro-ICT/ICD ethos of WSIS. Although the quality and scope of their efforts varied, some developing country governments did try to institute new multi-stakeholder fora or spaces in which the wider community could contribute to WSIS policymaking. This question is

17   The extensive literature on ICD issues can be accessed through such portals as the Development Gateway (www.developmentgateway.org) and the Communication Initiative (www.comminit.com).

discussed further in Chapter 6, which illustrates some country experiences from case studies undertaken for this study, but it is worth noting now that increased interest and enthusiasm in developing countries may not be matched in multilateral and bilateral donors.

Some of the most intriguing, but as yet uncertain, impacts of WSIS may be on the inter-governmental agencies and donor governments participating in the summit. Although development agencies had paid little attention to information and communication technologies for development in the early 1990s, by the time WSIS began the topic was both familiar and fashionable. The World Bank, UNESCO and other international agencies had developed substantial policies on ICD, while other specialist agencies were also looking seriously at its relevance to their work. Many bilateral donors had initiated ICT/ICD programmes of their own, from USAID's Leland Initiative to DFID's "Building Digital Opportunities" and the Acacia Programme of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

Some of these agencies had been involved in the G8 DOT Force and all played some part, in some cases reluctantly, in the subsequent UN ICT Task Force. None, however, according to interviewees, was likely to increase its activity in ICD as a specific *result* of WSIS taking place. WSIS was never really intended to raise their awareness but that of others, though it might have been expected to increase coordination of agency activities (in line with general development policy thinking on the need for greater aid harmonisation).

Interviewees from such agencies were divided about the impact which it has had on their agencies' engagement with the issues. Some felt that WSIS enhanced their ability to engage with partners and perhaps raised consciousness of their work amongst their colleagues. Others considered it a diversion from what might have been more productive ICD initiatives and suggested that it may even have reduced subsequent interest among their colleagues: "now that the summit is over", said one, "they think the issue has been dealt with and that we should move on to other things." This post-WSIS effect may be of particular interest where bilateral donors are concerned. These typically have very few staff engaged on ICT/ICD work. By the start, let alone the end, of the Tunis phase, they were exhibiting "WSIS fatigue". They were among those most sceptical of the value of a second phase and most concerned at it diverting attention away from specific initiatives being undertaken by their agencies.

In practice, since the end of WSIS, interviewees suggest there has if anything been a falling away of interest in ICTs from bilateral, and perhaps also multilateral, agencies. Certainly, there have been few major new ICD initiatives launched since WSIS - the Africa infrastructure initiative described in the following section being one exception. Fewer bilateral and multilateral agencies attended the ITU's

2006 World Telecommunication Development Conference than did that in 2002 - only the World Bank and UNESCO participated from the UN family in 2006, for example, while the UN ICT Task Force and the FAO were also present four years earlier.[18] Participation in the first meetings of WSIS follow-up action lines (discussed in Chapter 8) has been patchy, at best. Some bilateral agencies, notably DFID (UK), have downgraded the status of ICT/ICD work while few – the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) is one example – have raised its status. Bilateral agencies are more firmly mainstreaming ICD activity, and some (notably DFID, which has established a substantial Government and Transparency Fund including media support)[19] seem to be paying more attention now to more traditional information and communication roles in development (for example, to the media) than to technology.

All of which looks, from WSIS' point of view, rather counterproductive: the summit was meant to increase funding and resources to ICD, not to diminish them. It is too early yet to reach any firm conclusions on this, but some interviewees suggest that it may well be that WSIS (perhaps even its first phase) represents the highpoint of development agencies' interest in ICTs, rather than the start of something big. Senior decision-makers in many bilateral agencies seem to be less convinced than they were in 2001 of the potential of ICTs to achieve major impacts on the MDGs, at least in the short term, and to be more fearful of diverting resources from more tried and trusted approaches at this stage. However, as previous paragraphs suggest, this trend may coincide with a contrary increase of interest in ICTs within developing country governments, which may look more often to multilateral agencies for support where it is concerned. Time will tell how this turns out - though the WSIS follow-up process as it stands looks poorly equipped to monitor and evaluate on our behalf.

Infrastructure finance and Internet governance

Two issues were left unresolved by the Geneva phase of WSIS, passed to interim fora (the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms and the Working Group on Internet Governance), and these accounted for the majority of work undertaken during the second phase.

The two interim fora were crucially important to the way in which WSIS dealt with these unresolved issues. Much has been made of their difference in form and style, particularly the way in which they organised discussion of their issues and the way in which they handled multistakeholder

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18   See participation lists at www.itu.int/ITU-D/conferences/wtdc/2002/ and www.itu.int/ITU-D/wtdc06/index.html.

19   See DFID White Paper, *Making Governance Work for the Poor*, 2006, available from: www.dfid.gov.uk/wp2006/default.asp.

participation. A word on this here will help to clarify some of the points made below and in Chapters 6 and 7.

The Task Force on Financial Mechanisms followed a conventional format for United Nations agencies in addressing the issues before it. In the case of the TFFM, the UN Development Programme led the task force process, in association with the World Bank and UNDESA (the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs). Selected, regionally-balanced, representatives from key institutions concerned with infrastructure finance - including governments, UN and other inter-governmental organisations, and the private sector - acted as members of the Task Force. These members were not engaged actively in research and analysis. Consultants were hired to do this and to report to the Task Force, which then discussed their conclusions from an essentially political perspective. Consultation with the private sector and civil society was limited. The Task Force report was presented to the second PrepCom of WSIS' second phase, where it was largely agreed without dissent. None of this received much public attention.

The Working Group on Internet Governance, by contrast, was considerably more innovative in its structure and modus operandi. Participants - much more diverse, including significant numbers from the private sector, civil society and the Internet community - were selected through a process of mediated consultation managed by the UN and its appointed agents (the Working Group chair and secretariat), with a view to inclusiveness. Working Group members acted (or at least were asked to act, and mostly did) as individuals, not representatives of their institutions. They did the Group's work themselves, rather than hiring consultants; held open sessions to include the views of a wide range of other stakeholders; and debated their way to a consensus on the various points within their remit (or, in one case, to a set of options). Their report was received with much less consensus but formed a vital part of ongoing argument about Internet governance when the issue reverted to WSIS PrepComs. Their issue received more public attention than anything else in the whole Summit process.

Both fora were faced with the same problem: the under-representation of key stakeholders during negotiations on their issues during the first WSIS phase. In both cases, the critical issue here was not what is normally understood by multistakeholder participation - i.e. the involvement of the private sector and civil society, though these were (of course) excluded from formal negotiations in the WSIS process - but the absence of more specific groups whose expertise was vital and whose interests were directly concerned. In the case of the TFFM, this was the donor community (mainstream development agencies and bilateral national donors) responsible for the allocation of development funding. In that of the WGIG, it was the Internet community, those responsible for the provision and delivery of Internet services

and, indeed, for Internet governance itself. In both cases, the inclusion of expertise and knowledge from these groups was crucial to the outcome of WSIS negotiations on the issues. These representational questions are discussed in Chapter 7.

Both fora were also crucial to the degree of success that could be attributed to WSIS. The first summit almost broke down entirely on the question of infrastructure finance. Without a new forum to discuss this, there would have been no outcome document for heads of state to sign in Geneva. Internet governance was also a significant area of dispute in Geneva, but it was not until the Tunis phase that it reached the same degree of crisis as infrastructure finance had caused before. Without a resolution of these issues, WSIS today would be seen as a failure. The two processes, and the issues associated with them, are considered in turn below.

Infrastructure finance

The centrepiece of the problem posed to the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms was the proposal for a Digital Solidarity Fund made by President Wade of Senegal during the first WSIS phase and backed by a substantial number of other developing countries. This proposal, if agreed, would have established a new, probably UN-led, fund specifically concerned with financing ICT infrastructure and applications. It was opposed by donor countries during the first WSIS phase because they argued that it would divert funds from other established priorities (such as the MDGs), would be inconsistent with mainstreaming, and was in any case not needed since existing financing mechanisms were underused. The tussle between advocates and opponents of the Digital Solidarity Fund almost prevented the first summit from reaching agreement: only tough last-minute diplomacy by the Swiss PrepCom president forced through the compromise of referring the issue to an interim Task Force.

The Task Force on Financial Mechanisms has been quite widely disparaged, not least by some civil society organisations because of the narrow limits of multistakeholder participation they experienced. In addition, it has been quite widely suggested that the Task Force's report had nothing really new to say and that it had no real impact on the outcomes of WSIS. This criticism tends to come, however, from ICT/ICD-focused CSOs rather than from mainstream development agencies - which have been significantly absent from this debate. Discussions with those who are most closely involved in international ICT/ICD issues suggest that it is, however, a rather shallow assessment. The TFFM, they suggest, was presented with quite a complex problem, which underlay the remit it was handed. It is worth setting this problem out in some detail before looking further at the role of the TFFM and its implications.

International agencies and governments are alike committed to a series of international instruments which provide a framework for the allocation of development funds (from both multilateral agencies and bilateral donors). The most important of these are:

1. The Monterrey Consensus (the outcome of the 2002 United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development), which determines the overall framework for development aid finance.

2. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and its predecessor documents, which establish principles for the determination of development spending, including national ownership of development strategies and inter-agency harmonisation amongst donors.

3. The Millennium Development Goals, which establish priority targets - focused on poverty reduction - for the period up to 2015.

4. Poverty Reduction Strategies, i.e. national development plans formulated - at least in theory - through consultative processes, which provide the basis for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief, for World Bank financing agreements and for much bilateral donor support.

None of these international agreements gives priority to ICTs or envisages significant development (as opposed to private sector) funding for ICT infrastructure.

Orthodox development agency thinking on ICT infrastructure investment since the early 1990s had been that this should be left to the private sector. IFI, multilateral donor and bilateral donor investment in this context have therefore been largely confined to capacity-building: assisting governments to create the conditions for foreign direct investment (FDI) by privatising incumbent telecoms monopolies, liberalising telecoms markets in general and establishing independent regulatory authorities to promote competition. Private sector investment in telecoms infrastructure since the 1990s has been spectacular – one of the most substantial and successful areas of FDI yet experienced. This has in turn achieved very considerable growth in access to telecommunications. Teledensities (the number of telephones per 100 citizens) had been stagnant at around 0.5% in Least Developed Countries for many years, before the influx of FDI associated with liberalisation and the introduction of mobile technology boosted them from the late 1980s. This, again, has led to one of the fastest growth rates recorded for adoption of any technology.

Within the development community, this strategy has been regarded as successful, enabling available finance to be focused instead on other, more intractable, core infrastructure requirements such as water, power and transport. Only in the ICT sector had a perception begun growing, by the time WSIS began, that private sector investment might be insufficient to meet the future access gap for communications,

particularly if this were interpreted to include higher value ICTs like the Internet (whose effective use is increasingly dependent on broadband infrastructure).

The original Digital Solidarity Fund proposal - to set up a new mechanism explicitly for ICT infrastructure and applications - therefore lay outside both the core agreements on international development and the tenor of orthodox development agency thinking. Its achievement would require either reallocation of existing development funds (which would require, in effect, reinterpretation of the existing development agreements) or the allocation of new funding (which, were it available, donors would prefer to focus on the established MDGs). As some interviewees from the donor community saw it, the demand for the Digital Solidarity Fund amounted to the demand for ICTs to be treated as a new MDG – i.e. a new priority for development action - which would be inconsistent with the Monterrey and MDG agreements. Consenting to it would open up those core agreements to demands from other vested interest groups.

While the DSF was supported by many developing country delegations within the WSIS negotiations, donors also noted that these delegations were mostly led by officials from telecommunications or ICT ministries, who, not surprisingly, supported additional resources for their own areas of responsibility. They were unclear, however, if the DSF proposal also had support from mainstream development ministries or ministries of finance, whose priorities for funding lay in their Poverty Reduction Strategies and other instruments setting out national development objectives. They suspected that, like themselves, many national development leaders would be reluctant to see new resources allocated to sectors that did not fall within their PRS priorities. Privately, some national development leaders have indicated that this was their view, but that expressing solidarity with a developing country proposal for change also played an important part in determining their position on the DSF.

This series of observations suggests that two potential contests over resources were subsumed within the wider DSF debate: one between donors and aid beneficiary countries, which was essentially about the scale of development resources; and one between ICT advocates/ministries and mainstream development managers within both donors and developing countries, which was essentially about the desirability of allocating resources to ICTs.

The TFFM's mandate, here, was crucial. Donor countries ensured that this required it to review the use made of existing sources of finance as well as the desirability of something new. As the Geneva Plan of Action put it:

> While all existing financial mechanisms should be fully exploited, a thorough review of their adequacy in meeting the challenges of ICT for development should be completed by the end of December 2004. ... Based on

the conclusion of the review, improvements and innovations of financing mechanisms will be considered including the effectiveness, the feasibility and the creation of a voluntary Digital Solidarity Fund, as mentioned in the Declaration of Principles.[20]

To place the DSF proposal in the context of overall development finance and existing finance instruments, the TFFM also needed to bring mainstream development thinking into the debate about infrastructure finance, rather than leaving this to ICT specialists. Its membership structure – drawing on the ranks of development as well as infrastructure expertise – facilitated this. So did its methodology – using a consultancy report which focused on assessment of existing financial instruments and considered new demands in the context of past practice, and which placed ICT infrastructure investment itself within the context of overall development finance.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Task Force report is grounded in more mainstream development thinking than is the Geneva Plan of Action.[21] For this reason, the report has been considered conservative by many ICT-oriented observers, particularly in civil society. Its approach to the DSF itself also put this on the back burner. As described in Chapter 3, the Task Force took the view that existing financing instruments were insufficiently used at present and that there was scope for making further use of these and for alternative new financing initiatives such as public-private partnerships. It did not, therefore, endorse the DSF proposal in the form that it had been promoted. Indeed, the report dismissed the DSF proposal in very few words indeed, though it did "welcome" an attenuated voluntary fund.[22] Some interviewees, from some developing countries and from ICT-oriented civil society organisations in particular, see this as a rebuff to a developing country proposal from the international development establishment.

Some interviewees from that development establishment suggest a different interpretation – that the apparent conservatism of the Task Force report masks the starting point for a significant rethinking of the role of development finance in relation to ICT infrastructure. The Task Force report, they say, did look seriously at the changing nature of infrastructure finance, especially concerning remote and rural areas and concerning higher specification networks, recognising that the world might have reached a point in time where private sector investment had peaked and new technologies presented the possibility of much higher levels of service becoming available through different types of infrastructure. They argue that the alternative approaches to infrastructure finance suggested by the report, including widened scope for public investment (whether from governments or development agencies/IFIs) to supplement (but not replace) private sector-led investment strategies, mark as significant a change in overall thinking about ICT infrastructure finance as the original DSF proposal, and one that is more consistent with other development finance instruments. Joint public/private partnership investment, in particular, is mentioned in this context. While couched in conservative language, in other words, the Task Force report includes quite a significant movement away from the "private sector only" consensus that had dominated thinking on ICT infrastructure since the early 1990s.

One of the surprising features of the second phase of WSIS is that the infrastructure finance issue - which had almost prevented agreement in Geneva - barely resurfaced again after the Task Force report. The advocates of the Digital Solidarity Fund played virtually no part in the Task Force for Financial Mechanisms itself, apparently by choice, and accepted the almost total marginalisation of the DSF proposal in the TFFM report without demur when it was discussed in the second PrepCom of the Tunis phase. A voluntary DSF was established, but has failed to make a mark and is generally considered unlikely to do so in future. Many interviewees considered this vestigial DSF no more than a face-saving exercise (though one that was indeed effective at saving face).

Why did the DSF, which had caused such a fuss in Geneva, raise so few hackles barely six months later? One suggested explanation is that the rethinking described above within the Task Force report led shortly afterwards to a significant change in actual practice. Keen to avoid the DSF and to show that alternatives were viable, the World Bank and the European Commission took the opportunity of the Africa regional meeting for the second phase of WSIS, in Accra in February 2005, to put forward a new infrastructure initiative for Africa: an initiative which they presented as indicating a new, more active approach to ICT infrastructure finance by development agencies, and which gave the proponents of the DSF sufficient value to call off the hunt for a better Fund within the main negotiations.

This interpretation suggests, in other words, that the infrastructure finance issue has been more dynamic than the general ICT and development debate described above. It suggests that the developing country-led proposal for a Digital Solidarity Fund was effectively bought off by the introduction of alternatives which were more acceptable to donors (industrial countries) but met enough of the priorities of the DSF's proponents (who also recognised that the strength of donor hostility was unlikely to be overcome). Subsequent publications by the World Bank and other international actors have consolidated an apparent shift in emphasis towards more proactive IFI investment in ICT infrastructure, albeit within the same overall framework of private sector leadership and the promotion of sector restructuring/liberalisation.

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20 Geneva Plan of Action, section D2, article 27.f.

21 The report, *Financing ICTD*, is available from: www.itu.int/wsis/tffm/final-report.pdf.

22 See *Financing ICTD*, p. 94.

At the heart of this issue, perhaps, lay a difference of perception between developing and donor countries. Developing countries pressed hard for a particular approach to be agreed during the first phase of WSIS, with strong leadership at high level coming from the President of Senegal. Support for this position was widespread within the developing world, coming not just from Africa but also from countries such as India. It was also backed by many civil society organisations, expressing solidarity with a developing country demand – though it should be borne in mind that few of the civil society organisations involved in WSIS were development NGOs. Developing country solidarity was, however, weaker than it might have appeared to be. It was Francophone West African countries in particular that supported President Wade; privately, delegates from other parts of Africa expressed some concern about the original DSF proposal, and interviews suggest that these private doubts were shared by more powerful figures in non-ICT ministries. Ultimately, it was the developing country bloc, not donors, that blinked in Geneva and allowed the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms to be established.

The DSF's supporters also failed to pursue their proposal vigorously during and after the TFFM, particularly after a more substantive proposal for African infrastructure was put on the table. The most apparent gain from this issue becoming so prominent in Geneva was obtained by those African developing countries that will benefit from this initiative, and it could be argued, therefore, that their concerted effort and brinkmanship in the Geneva phase paid off. Taking this issue to the wire did lead to a reward. The DSF per se was not essential to its proponents, though the establishment of a voluntary fund helped to save any face that needed saving.[23] What was important was some money on the table, and the switch in thinking on the part of donors that accompanied it. Time will tell whether the scope and scale of the African infrastructure initiative will look substantial enough in years to come.

The switch in donor thinking involved here should not be exaggerated at this stage. Nevertheless, a good many in the development sector think it was probably overdue. Stimulation of private sector investment proved very successful in promoting telecommunications access in the 1990s, but has left a residual access gap that, it seems, can only be addressed by greater intervention. International development agencies continue to take the view that private sector investment, supported by restructuring and liberalisation, will account for most required investment, but not all.[24] Private sector investment may also be insufficient to stimulate higher bandwidth access in the future.

The relative priority to be accorded this form of infrastructure remains unclear to most donors (and, if PRS processes are to be believed, to their development partners). However, the DSF proposal was sufficient to push some into a rethinking of their long-term strategy, initially as a way of avoiding what they saw as a worse outcome (an independent, UN-managed fund), latterly with more conviction. This could be described as a victory, as readily as a defeat, for developing country solidarity. Its implications are discussed in Chapter 6.

Internet governance

When WSIS was first proposed, no-one expected Internet governance to be one of its priorities. In fact, there was almost no discussion of Internet governance in the first phase preparatory process until the Western Asia (Middle East) regional meeting - the last to be held - in February 2003. Yet, from that point on, issues to do with Internet governance became hugely important and highly divisive. Internet governance was one of two issues which almost collapsed the first summit session. It predominated in the second phase so much that some have described Tunis as a world summit on Internet governance rather than on the information society.

Why did Internet governance become so important to the WSIS process? A number of suggestions were made about this by interviewees:

Firstly, some suggest, it was an issue waiting in the wings for the right occasion to come along. Almost uniquely in human history, the Internet has become very important with very little government involvement. It was other stakeholders – at first individuals (computer experts, many with anti-authoritarian instincts) and cooperative fora that they established (such as the Internet Engineering Task Force) – later joined by private sector actors, that took and moulded the shape of the Internet (in spite of its origins in the US military). The result was a global phenomenon largely outside the control of governments or the remit of inter-governmental organisations. However practical this may have been in its own terms, it was a vacuum that the institutions of international governance were unlikely to leave alone for ever. Many governments wanted to take charge of something that could undermine their own authority. Some felt it inherently wrong that any major social force should be so far outwith government control. In this sense, the Internet governance issue might be seen as one of the authority of governments vis-à-vis their citizens.

Secondly, where governments were engaged, they were not equitably so. Of course, inequity in government ownership and engagement in international issues is nothing unusual in itself. In this case, however, the apparent inequity was particularly marked, with the US government at least appearing to have great potential powers over both

23 The DSF's limited activity to date can be found at www.dsf-fsn.org/cms/content/view/43/77/lang,en.

24 The GSM Association has suggested that private investment will deliver access to 95% of the world's population – see its report *Universal Access* at www.gsmworld.com/universalaccess/index.shtml.

domains and root servers, control over which, if exercised, would impact strongly on national sovereignty. The extent to which such powers had been exercised was minimal and the extent to which they could be exercised in practice was uncertain, but the issue had obvious symbolic importance – not least as a symbol of American hegemony in a mono-polar world, and thereby also of the international balance of power between industrial and developing countries. This dimension of the question might be seen as one of the authority of governments versus other governments, particularly less powerful versus more powerful governments.

Thirdly, a good many interviewees believe, rightly or not, that the dispute over Internet governance was driven by ambitions within the ITU – not necessarily the ITU as a whole, but some officials and some member-states – for the ITU to assume the role of overseer of the Internet. In this context, the question of Internet governance can be seen as part of the long process of restructuring communications, in which the ITU had gradually lost much of its authority over telecoms and in which the Internet had emerged outside the control of established institutions and with new institutions of its own, some of them with quite different (and more multistakeholder) conceptions of authority. This aspect might be seen as a contest of older "international system" models of governance versus newer (to some, subversive) models of governance being piloted by new (and equally, to some, subversive) pioneers – among them, ICANN.

Fourthly, some suggest, the dispute over Internet governance was driven by a further coincidence of circumstances. Internet governance became important within WSIS around the time of the Iraq war.[25] Many of those countries that were most hostile to the US position on Internet governance were also those most hostile to US involvement in Iraq and US foreign policy in general. Internet governance, to them, may have been simply a proxy for a different foreign policy argument: its critics versus the United States.

And finally, some interviewees suggest, more controversially, that the very lack of immediate crisis in Internet governance helped to make it a point of crisis within WSIS. There were issues of controversy in Internet governance, certainly, but there always had been and the system, in the old phrase, wasn't "broke". The Internet would continue to evolve without a revolution in its governance. Indeed, many – including most industrial country governments, private sector organisations and Internet pioneers – believe that the Internet's dynamic growth has *only* been possible because of the low level of government involvement there has been. An argument about Internet governance would not stop this dynamic growth. The price of arguing was

therefore low – lower than it might have been on other issues – and posed less risk to those engaged upon it (though the impact of changes that might result could be profound).

As with infrastructure finance, Internet governance was an issue which divided developing from industrial countries. On the whole, industrial countries were satisfied with the level of Internet governance currently prevailing at the start of WSIS: they felt that more governance would slow down innovation and opportunities for investment. Developing countries in general were less comfortable that an increasingly important sector lacked inter-governmental oversight comparable with the ITU's historic role in telecommunications and the Universal Postal Union (UPU)'s in postal services. Both groups of countries, however, had important fractures within them. Much of Europe was uncomfortable with what it saw as the United States' aggressive defence of its existing "powers" over ICANN and root servers; while differences emerged between the assertiveness of a number of large developing countries and the bulk of Least Developed Countries on the issue (discussed in Chapter 6).

The private sector broadly shared industrial country governments' perceptions of the issue here. Private sector leadership, it felt, had done well by the Internet. Greater government control, it felt, would stifle the innovation which drove it forward. Subjection to an ITU-style standard-setting regime, rather than the fluid modus operandi of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) and similar structures, it felt, would be particularly damaging. Suspicion of ITU encroachment was particularly strong within the Internet community. As one interviewee put it, "if the ITU had been in charge, we wouldn't have the Internet today." The consensus business view was set out in an International Chamber of Commerce issues paper released shortly after the Geneva summit:

> The pace of change, the fast evolving state of the Internet and the creation of a global information society heighten the risks associated with premature or unnecessary government regulation.… Business has a strong market incentive to foster the empowerment of users. But it will only make the necessary investments if it can trust that governments will recognize and reinforce the leadership of business in responding to the highly dynamic nature of the Internet.[26]

Civil society's view was more distinct and more divided. On the one hand, most civil society organisations sympathised with developing countries' demand for more say vis-à-vis industrial powers. At the same time, they were reluctant to concede more powers over the Internet to governments of any stamp, fearing that this would lead to greater censorship and political control. As with human

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25 The Western Asia (Middle East) regional meeting which initiated Internet governance as a major issue took place in February 2003, during the international political crisis preceding the March 2003 invasion of Iraq.

26 ICC, *Issues Paper on Internet Governance,* January 2004, p. 10, available from: www.iccwbo.org/home/e_business/policy/ICC%20issues%20paper%20on%20internet%20Governance.pdf.

rights, therefore, there was some conflict within civil society between support for a greater voice for developing countries, on the one hand, and desire for a diminished role for governments, on the other. The consensus view was summarised in the independent civil society declaration issued at the end of the Geneva phase:

> … the Internet cannot be governed effectively by any one organisation or set of interests. An exclusionary intergovernmental model would be especially ill suited to its unique characteristics; only a truly open, multistakeholder, and flexible approach can ensure the Internet's continued growth and transition into a multilingual medium.[27]

Like infrastructure finance, Internet governance proved intractable towards the end of the Geneva summit phase. Unlike infrastructure finance, it did not fade away during the second phase but became, if anything, even more contentious. Like infrastructure finance, the Geneva summit referred this issue to an interim forum. Unlike infrastructure finance, that forum – the Working Group on Internet Governance – adopted an innovative, multistakeholder format which probed creatively into the issues that it had before it.

The WGIG had the remit to:

i.   develop a working definition of Internet governance;

ii. identify the public policy issues that are relevant to Internet governance;

iii. develop a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of governments, existing intergovernmental and international organisations and other forums as well as the private sector and civil society from both developing and developed countries;

iv. prepare a report on the results of this activity to be presented for consideration and appropriate action for the second phase of WSIS in Tunis in 2005.[28]

Most interviewees – but with important exceptions – considered the WGIG to have been effective in advancing the debate on these issues by the time it reported in June 2005. Interviewees in general suggest that it was able to agree a workable definition of Internet governance, and develop a broad consensus on many of the issues before it. Exceptions to the consensus about this among those interviewed tended to be those critical of the WGIG's conclusions, in particular those who wished to promote a more formal model of Internet governance than that which was finally suggested by the Tunis outcome documents.

The methodology the WGIG used, as a working group, was comparable in many ways to the commissions which informed many international policy issues in the 1980s – for example, the Brandt Commission on international development, the Palme Commission on common security and the Brundtland Commission on sustainable development. These commissions brought together a range of people with different backgrounds, different expertise and different social or political outlooks; treated them as individuals rather than as representatives of their respective organisations or communities; and addressed a substantive issue of international concern by achieving consensus among themselves but not necessarily across the whole spectrum of international opinion (as, for example, a UN summit must attempt to do). The nearest analogue to the WGIG in recent ICT experience was probably the G8 DOT Force of 2000-2002, composed of individuals from government, private sector and civil society in each of the G8 countries and eight selected developing countries.

The selection of WGIG personnel is described in Chapter 7. At this point, however, it is worth noting that the selection process was much more inclusive than was normal for UN appointed fora. Private sector and civil society organisations were invited to put forward nominations, and their nominations were, by and large, approved. This style of appointment was adopted deliberately by the Working Group's chair (the experienced former UN Under Secretary-General Nitin Desai, who had been responsible for organising many previous summits) and secretary (the Swiss diplomat Markus Kummer) in response to the specific issue. Because of the nature of existing arrangements, they felt that Internet governance could not properly be addressed by a standard UN-style task force of representatives from government and inter-governmental organisations, which would have lacked both expertise and credibility. The real experts had to be drawn into the debate.

Much the same applied to the WGIG's working methods. One member described the key moment in determining how the WGIG worked as being when the chairman told members that they were expected to participate as individuals rather than as representatives of particular organisations or vested interests, and specifically that they should use the singular personal pronoun ("I" not "we") when making contributions. The issues facing the WGIG were highly politicised. Many WGIG members had strongly held opinions, and had difficulty in understanding each others' perspectives on the issues. Participants recalled that requiring them to think as individuals rather than representatives, and to work together rather than responding to consultants' views, encouraged members to confront some of their assumptions and question some of their differences with colleagues. The outcome was not necessarily agreement, but did include greater understanding and some displacement of assumption and (in some cases) ignorance by flexibility and knowledge. A conventional

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27 *Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs*, p.22, available from: www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en?&id=1179|1208.

28 Geneva Plan of Action, section C6, article 13.

UN-style task force, interviewed participants agreed, was more likely to have remained confrontational, and would have been less likely to achieve (at least as substantive) a consensus report.

Holding open sessions at which all-comers could contribute to the WGIG's deliberations was also innovative and constructive. As discussed in Chapter 7, this enabled important actors who had little other route into WSIS to participate in discussions of considerable importance to them. The quality of contributions made during open sessions was generally high, and this increased confidence in the WGIG process among different stakeholder groups, particularly the Internet community. WGIG members paid attention during open sessions and report making significant use of the evidence put forward in their closed discussion and drafting sessions.

The WGIG was able, in this way, to produce something that could be described by its participants as a multistakeholder consensus. Though WGIG members participated as individuals, they cohered sufficiently for the WGIG report to have something in it for most and to be something which they felt they could promote when Internet governance issues returned to the main WSIS PrepCom process. By building a common understanding within a group that comprised the different perspectives on the issues, the WGIG set a perimeter around the debate that followed and helped to focus discussion during the tense and difficult final negotiating stages. While the report did not provide the formal framework for these negotiations, it could not be ignored and certainly influenced WSIS' final outcome on the subject. Whether this provides a model for other themes of international discourse is discussed in Chapter 7.

The final negotiating stages on Internet governance were, nevertheless, as divisive as those of the first summit phase. They saw the opening of what was generally interpreted as a split between the United States and European Union; and saw a gap, discussed in Chapter 6, develop between the positions of larger and more powerful developing countries, on the one hand, and Least Developed Countries on the other. The final outcome – described in Chapter 3 – could be and was seen as a victory by different groups of participants with widely different views, and left much up for grabs in the post-WSIS world. All those interviewed, however, stressed that the ability to achieve agreement of any sort during the final WSIS PrepComs was greatly influenced by skilful chairing of the PrepCom subcommittee assigned to this (by the Pakistani diplomat Masood Khan). Individuals, too, often play an important part in determining the outcomes of international negotiations, and discussions on Internet governance benefited from three particularly skilful performers, without whom any kind of consensus might have been much more difficult to achieve. ▪

CHAPTER 6
WSIS and developing countries

International relations are built around power. Large countries with powerful economies and military might have more influence on what happens in the world than microstates or the impoverished. Size matters; money talks.

Most inter-governmental organisations, by contrast - and UN summits - are structured around equality of sovereign states. China, with 1,300,000,000 people, has one vote, the same as Kiribati (population around 90,000); the United States (GDP = USD 12,455 billion) the same as Lesotho (GDP = USD 1.5 billion).[29]

In practice, the pressures and processes of inter-governmental organisations exercise some mitigating effect on the exercise of military and financial power; but the political realities of population size and economic wealth, of access to and control of scarce resources, of strategic and military power, etc. predominate. Negotiating processes such as those at international summits reflect and refine the balances of power and authority between individual countries whose status within them is made up of many different factors - hard facts such as those already described, but also "softer" factors such as established international partnerships, cultural and historic ties, the personalities and authority of governments and individual personalities, the quality of expertise and other input into the negotiating processes concerned. Hard facts of size, wealth, resources etc. might be described as determining the "natural" weight of a country in this context, but it can punch well above or below this weight – have a louder or a softer voice - according to the impact of these softer factors.

The "Louder Voices" report, published in 2002, reviewed the extent of developing country participation in international ICT decision-making bodies, and in particular the constraints facing developing countries in respect of their participation. The report is briefly summarised in Chapter 2. Its insights formed one of the primary impulses behind the present study, which has been concerned to see whether the WSIS summit format enabled developing countries to have more substantial impact – a louder voice - and whether WSIS may have lasting implications for developing country participation in other ICT fora in the future. This chapter focuses on these particular issues, and both begins and ends with a specific look at the conclusions of

the "Louder Voices" report. These are quoted at some length in Chapter 2 but, for convenience, are summarised again more briefly here:

1. Most developing countries are members of established international organisations with ICT responsibilities, such as the ITU and WTO, and are usually represented at their meetings. However, there is not as yet an effective connection between the agendas of these organisations, their decisions, and the international development goals set out in the UN Millennium Declaration. [This point is considered in Chapter 5 above.]

2. Effective participation in decision-making is not limited to what happens before and during meetings. It requires sustained engagement with issues over an extended period of time, backed up by substantial technical, policymaking and negotiating capacity.

3. Action to strengthen the ICT policy capacity of developing countries must include action to level the policy playing field so as to ensure that the needs of developing countries are on the agenda of international ICT fora and that they are included in decision-making processes. Three critical aspects of this concern:

    a. Lack of easy, affordable and timely access to information about ICT-related issues, decision-making fora and processes

    b. Logistical problems, including the frequency and location of international meetings and restrictions on participation (for example, by private sector and civil society experts)

    c. Ineffective use of financial resources available to support participation.

4. Weaknesses in national policymaking are, however, even more significant in leading to underrepresentation and ineffective participation. Three critical aspects of this are:

    a. Lack of policy awareness, at all levels of government and citizenship, of the potential role of ICTs.

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29 Data from World Bank, web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/ DATASTATISTICS/0,,contentMDK:20535285~menuPK:1390200~ pagePK:64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html.

b. Lack of technical and policy capacity on ICT issues, particularly in respect of emerging technologies and new policy areas - such as migration from circuit-switched to IP networks and indeed Internet issues in general.

c. Weaknesses in national and regional policy-making processes, including:

   i. Lack of political leadership

   ii. Absence of national ICT strategies

   iii. Ineffective coordination between different government departments and agencies with ICT responsibilities

   iv. Lack of private sector and civil society participation in national decision-making

   v. Inadequate preparation for international meetings

   vi. Ineffective use of financial and human resources.

As discussed in earlier chapters, summit processes such as WSIS are different from normal international negotiations. They have a more general character than conventional decision-making processes, looking at a "big issue" rather than detail – which makes them more accessible to those that are less fully informed about an issue. They have less sectoral baggage, in the sense of issues and precedents, alliances and animosities, that influence work in decision-making fora such as ITU study groups or WTO committees and working groups. They are less rules-bound, which may create more space for creativity in negotiation – though summits, too, have over the years developed standard ways of proceeding, built around preparatory committees, regional meetings and the like. They are more political – with participation in the final summit event often being at the level of head of state rather than head of mission or head of government department.

Three further differences, interviews suggested, may have the biggest impact on different ways of behaving:

- Firstly, summits are one-off events rather than ongoing negotiations. They do not need to look back to what has gone before or forward to what comes after in the same way as continuous negotiating fora like those in the ITU or WTO.

- Secondly, they do not have to reach firm conclusions that bind governments' future behaviour. The outcome documents of summit meetings are often aspirational, urging courses of action rather than requiring them. Outcomes do not necessarily stick, as those who welcomed the Kyoto Protocol on climate change have learnt to their regret.

- Thirdly, however, as summits are global meetings representing the entire United Nations family, their delegations feel obliged, at least, to reach consensus. Dialogues in most international fora can be resolved, if it comes to it, by votes. In summits, consensus is generally expected, if not necessarily required. Outcome documents should be signed by every government, not just by a majority – which means that, while summits may force recalcitrant governments to agree to something that they would not otherwise have been prepared to sign (as at Kyoto?), they are just as likely to stick to the lowest common denominator of agreement.

This suggests, prima facie, that the disadvantages which developing countries face in international decision-making fora, as described in "Louder Voices", may be less acute in summits. Summit work is less technical, and less technical expertise is therefore required. Summit activity is focused on fewer specific meetings, and there is much less need to cover simultaneous subsidiary meetings than in conventional decision-making fora – which makes life easier for smaller delegations. The pressure on developing countries to make concessions is weaker because "decisions" made by summits are less "decisive" than those made by (for example) ITU Radiocommunications Conferences (i.e. they have less immediate or certain impact on important stakeholders). Though votes are rarely taken, the principle behind "one nation: one vote" is much clearer at summits than it is elsewhere; and solidarity between blocs of countries may be easier to achieve.

The need for consensus may also give countries which are normally weak in international governance more influence than they might otherwise wield. A number of representatives of major countries in WSIS commented in interviews that their main objective at the summit was to prevent decisions they considered inappropriate from being taken rather than to secure positive objectives of their own – suggesting that the pressure to conform may be somewhat reversed in summits, acting more upon the minority industrial countries than the (politically and economically) weaker developing countries taking part. The shift away from the established relationships of conventional international negotiations, the different power structure and the higher degree of politicisation within them may make summits particularly susceptible to "policy trading", i.e. to agreements between countries or blocs of countries that, for example, country X will support a particular policy line of interest to country Y within the summit in return for comparable concessions in entirely different negotiations being conducted elsewhere.

On the other hand, the observations above also suggest, prima facie, that the outcomes of summits are likely to have less immediate impact, and so to be less valuable to developing countries than those of more conventional decision-making processes. Politicisation also, obviously,

carries the risk that a summit will reach less optimal positions on the issues with which it is ostensibly most concerned than might otherwise occur.

What does the experience of developing countries, as developing country participants described it, have to suggest about these various hypotheses? The following sections look at this from two perspectives: participation in the international summit itself, and participation in national policymaking processes related to the development of policies for WSIS. The latter discussion leads forward to consideration of civil society and wider "multistakeholder" participation in Chapter 7.

Participation in the Summit

Chapter 4 briefly discussed the participation of different delegations in WSIS. Participation varied substantially between countries, both in numbers of delegates and in the composition of delegations.

Some countries paid much more attention to the WSIS process than did others, both at plenary sessions and, more importantly, during the preparatory committees. An earlier APC study looked in some detail at African participation in the various meetings associated with the first phase of the summit.[30] This found, for example, that all but five of fifty-four African countries were represented during the initial Bamako consultation meeting in May 2002, and all but six at the Geneva summit in December 2003. Participation in PrepComs varied considerably. A few African countries – notably Cameroon, Mali, South Africa, Tanzania and Tunisia – were well-represented throughout, but between ten and fifteen African countries chose not to attend each PrepCom. Three African countries had delegations over sixty strong at the Geneva summit while, as noted, six were officially unrepresented. Similar variations in the level and scope of country participation can be found during the second phase. Participation lists, illustrating the numbers taking part from different countries in the two main summit sessions and in one second phase PrepCom, can be found in Annex 1.

Of course, the size of delegations is no clear proxy for their degree of influence, but it probably tends to indicate the extent to which a government was taking WSIS seriously and saw it as an opportunity to further its own objectives, to learn from the experience and networking opportunities available, or to make sure that the "wrong" decisions were less likely to be reached. In some cases, delegates suggested, delegation size and level were due to the personal priorities of national leaders. President Wade of Senegal, for example, has sought to play a significant leadership role

within Africa so far as WSIS, and ICT/ICD in general, are concerned. In other countries, political leaders saw much less gain to be achieved from upgrading their national profile at this event.

As well as total numbers, as suggested in earlier chapters, the composition of national delegations was particularly interesting. The APC study of African participation in the first summit phase found that, in most African countries, delegations were predominantly made up of two groups – diplomats, particularly from countries' missions in Geneva, who took the lead in actual negotiations during PrepComs; and representatives of the established telecommunications sector, led by the communications ministries who were their countries' primary interfaces with the ITU, but also including substantial numbers of personnel from communications regulatory commissions and from the former incumbent fixed telecommunications operating companies. Participation in delegations from other stakeholders was sparse. There was little representation from mainstream development ministries, for example, which might have contributed more effectively to discussion of the role of ICTs in development; little from the private sector or civil society; little or none from the broadcasting sector, which provides the most widely available ICT services in developing countries; little again from new ICT markets such as mobile telephone companies and the Internet community.

Much the same pattern prevailed in the second summit phase. Under-representation of the Internet community in national delegations may have been particularly significant here given the amount of time that phase spent on Internet governance, and the limited understanding of it shown by many diplomats and conventional telecommunications specialists.

Many interviewees remarked that the domination of many delegations by the national telecommunications establishment had an obvious effect on participation in negotiations, and especially on developing country input. Telecoms-led delegations found it much easier to address telecoms issues than they did to focus on development questions. When the latter arose, they were poorly equipped to present national development priorities, or to position ICT issues accurately within these. Their contributions tended to focus on the potential of technology rather than the problems requiring development attention. For many development-focused interviewees, this was an opportunity missed. WSIS could have offered scope for developing countries to challenge the ICT sector to focus on their core development objectives. In practice, it did not.

Women were also poorly represented in national delegations. Just 19% of official country delegates in the Tunis summit, on average, were women, the same figure as in Geneva. Industrial country delegations were more likely to include women than those from developing countries

30 D. Souter, "African participation in WSIS: review and discussion paper", APC, 2004, available from: rights.apc.org/training/contents/ictpol_en/ictmodule.2006-05-18.6637944641/ictunit.2006-05-19.5882667093?set_language=en.

(72%, on average, of OECD country delegations were female in Geneva, 73% in Tunis). This gender imbalance is by no means untypical of participation in international ICT decision-making fora, but is at odds with the principles of gender equality advanced in summit principles and texts. Participation lists illustrating these figures are included in Annex 1. A more detailed analysis of gender participation, however, should also explore the relative status of men and women within delegations, which is not readily discernible from the available participation lists.

As well as these general issues of participation, it is worth looking at the participation of developing countries in the three other key debates that took place during WSIS: on information and communication rights, on infrastructure finance and on Internet governance. As noted in Chapter 5, all three of these saw differences between countries which, while by no means exclusively between industrial and developing countries, had significant overtones within them of this development divide.

The question of information and communication rights cuts to the heart of relations between governments and citizens. Participatory political structures place high value on information and communication rights – on freedoms of expression, on individual citizens' rights to dissent, to organise, to publish what they want. Few countries, however, have fully open political cultures of this kind. Many governments see information and communication rights as potential threats to their authority, particularly if that governmental authority itself is weak or if it is ideologically based on belief in government's responsibility to rule in the perceived interest of the people rather than at their behest. The disjuncture between participatory and authoritarian approaches to government, and so to information and communication rights, is closely paralleled in attitudes towards the participation in decision-making of civil society and the private sector. (It also affected relations amongst governments, for instance in the underlying tensions throughout the process that resulted from some governments questioning the appropriateness of holding WSIS 2 in a country that significantly constrained freedoms of information and communication.)

The arguments between governments over information and communication rights at WSIS should not be caricatured as being between industrial and developing countries but seen as lying between these different government approaches. However, most of the leading countries which challenged information and communication rights and which most strongly objected to multistakeholder participation were developing countries, while most of those which championed these were from the North. In truth, interviewees suggest, the majority of governments on both sides of the development divide were not particularly concerned about these issues – but those that were pursued them fiercely. (A couple of interviewees suggested that the

government of China argued so vociferously against information and communication rights during the first phase in order to lay the ground for later arguments about the Internet rather than because this was such a high priority for it per se; though clearly issues of information and communication rights have a high profile in China today.)

Differences of participation in the debate on infrastructure finance have been considered in Chapter 5. The lead role in this particular debate came from one country (Senegal), supported strongly by its neighbours in West Africa, less strongly by those in the rest of Africa, and less strongly again by other developing countries. Financing ICTs and ICD was problematic for the countries concerned, especially for LDCs. Those delegations that argued most forcibly for a Digital Solidarity Fund tended to be countries which had difficulty – mostly because of their development status – in securing foreign investment for ICT development. (It should be borne in mind, however, that telecoms sector-led delegations may not always have reflected the views of national governments as a whole on development finance.) With some exceptions (e.g. India), larger and more influential developing countries which did not have such financing problems did not play a prominent part in the argument. The fact that it disappeared so comprehensively from the agenda for the second phase of WSIS after African LDCs had secured what they considered sufficient gains in February 2005 (see Chapter 5) suggests that this reflected a division of interest among developing countries as well as a division of opinion between developing and industrial blocs.

Developing country participation in the discussion about Internet governance is, perhaps, the most interesting of these debates. In this case, it was not LDCs that played the most prominent role, but a small group of larger developing countries which adopted positions particularly hostile to the United States. These countries – notable among them China, Brazil, Pakistan, South Africa and Iran – share a number of common characteristics. These are relatively large countries, with markets sufficiently large for them to have few problems attracting external investment in the ICT sector (and so not concerned to win concessions in other areas like financing mechanisms). They could support large delegations, including personnel with substantial expertise in the areas under discussion. They are also active in other international fora, on other issues, asserting their status as major players, sometimes in "like-minded" partnerships, sometimes independently. These characteristics distinguish them from the majority of developing countries, particularly Least Developed Countries, for whom issues such as infrastructure investment are much more important. A number of interviewees from LDCs, particularly in Africa, expressed frustration that their efforts to secure gains they considered important to them through the Internet governance debate were frustrated by the

politicisation of that debate by these larger and more powerful development countries – "the ultras", as one such delegate described them. Other observers of the Internet governance debate also commented on this distinction between LDC and more powerful countries' participation.

It is, of course, always dangerous to think of "developing countries" as a homogeneous bloc rather than a category that is sometimes useful, sometimes not. However, the emergence of a (relatively small) group of large and more powerful developing countries, acting assertively, either individually or as a "like-minded" group, and sometimes claiming to speak on behalf of developing countries as a whole - has been a feature of a number of recent international negotiations. The Doha round of WTO negotiations and the development agenda within WIPO (the World Intellectual Property Organisation), for example, has seen similar alliances. It is unclear whether this represents a lasting trend or a passing phase in international discourse, and WSIS does not really provide evidence either way, other than to reaffirm the dangers of underestimating differences among developing countries.

As suggested in Chapter 5, it is difficult to determine winners and losers in the Internet governance debate. On the whole, the difficult decisions involved have merely been deferred. That may represent, in a sense, a victory for those countries and stakeholders that considered them important enough to raise the WSIS stakes, and so had most to lose from losing. Few interviewees thought that LDCs and other low-income countries gained much, though they did suggest that a few – such as Ghana – raised their profile through the issues and gained respect from other participants.

Regional meetings

One final area of participation is worth exploring here. As well as global PrepComs, the preparatory process in both WSIS summit phases included regional (in reality, more or less continental) preparatory conferences. These varied substantially in character. Those in Africa included quite substantial civil society participation, while those in Asia/Pacific, for example, were much more strongly led by governments. Some had a dramatic impact on the course of WSIS – notably the Middle East regional event during the first phase, which introduced Internet governance as a major summit theme; others were much less significant, for example the first phase European regional event, whose outcomes were so insubstantial that the experience was not repeated in the second phase. The two African regional events provide an interesting instance of how this tier of summit preparation could engage with WSIS.

During the first phase, Africa was home to the first regional conference, held in Bamako, Mali in May 2002, even before the first PrepCom had begun to set the terms of reference for the WSIS process as a whole. This was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, some participants suggested, it enabled African countries to set the tone: to put an African agenda on the table at the very beginning of the summit process. On the other hand, others pointed out, it meant that the main opportunity for African regional discussion was over and done with before the PrepCom process had begun to define the issues that would really preoccupy the summit. At a regional level, Africa therefore had less opportunity to debate these issues than other regions, and less scope to put forward a considered continental point of view. (The emergence of Internet governance as an issue from the last of the regional events made this a significant problem for other regions, too.) The Bamako meeting raised a number of important African issues, including infrastructure investment, regulation and enabling environments, and multilingualism. It produced an outcome document which addressed requirements to different stakeholders, including African governments, inter-governmental organisations and the WSIS secretariat. It also demonstrated quite impressive multistakeholder participation, and its conclusions were substantially influenced by civil society.

The Bamako Bureau which it established to represent Africa collectively during the remainder of the preparatory process, however, found it hard to sustain a comparable network or represent such a comprehensive range of thinking later in the summit phase. Its presentation of 21 "priorities" for Africa during the second PrepCom illustrated the difficulty it had in focusing on Africa's most important issues rather than listing its concerns.[31]

The Africa regional conference during the second phase took place shortly after the report of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms was published, and proved an important stage in the resolution, within WSIS, of the crisis surrounding the proposed Digital Solidarity Fund. Non-regional donors present at this meeting had understood the need to defuse argument about the DSF and begun to recognise some of the new challenges for infrastructure finance posed by the Task Force's report. The regional conference in Accra was an opportunity for them to put forward an African infrastructure initiative which offered African countries some of what they had been seeking through the DSF. Together with endorsement of a limited voluntary DSF, this was sufficient to defuse that conflict.

Although this was not necessarily apparent to them at the time, participants in both these African regional events felt subsequently that they had had substantial value – the former in enabling the continent, including civil society, to discuss issues in some depth and set the basis for future networking; the latter in drawing forward a new alignment

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31 The 21 priorities are available from: africa.rights.apc.org/
    index.shtml?apc=ie_1&x=30659.

between donors and African regional institutions such as NEPAD (the New Partnership for Africa's Development). This does not seem to have been complemented, however, by much discussion of WSIS within those regional institutions themselves. African input to WSIS took place at a national and a continental level, rather than that of continental sub-regions. WSIS was not a major topic of interest, for example, in gatherings of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community, or the West African economic partnership ECOWAS. Some interviewees felt that this was an opportunity missed, to develop a stronger sub-regional dimension to Africa's input and to focus on the continent's diversity rather than its commonalities. This is not, however, a problem that is unique to ICTs.

National policymaking processes

The "Louder Voices" study found that weaknesses in national policymaking processes were more important in explaining the limitations of developing country participation in international ICT decision-making than deficiencies in the structure of international decision-making bodies. Would the same be found in respect of WSIS? Country case studies were undertaken for the present study in five varying developing countries – in Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ethiopia, India and Kenya – in order to address this question. With one exception, they found processes that were comparably weak in terms of both national and international engagement. This section summarises the evidence from these case studies concerning participation in international meetings, while evidence concerning the national policymaking process is summarised in Chapter 7. Copies of the country case studies are available online.[32]

The lead role for WSIS in all of the case study countries was taken by a government department which was technologically oriented and usually within the telecommunications establishment – the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) in India; the Ministry of Science and Information Technology in Bangladesh; the National Telecommunications Council (and Secretariat) in Ecuador; the Ethiopian Telecommunications Authority (the national telecoms regulator) in Ethiopia; and the Kenya Communications Commission (ditto) and then the Ministry of Transport and Communications in Kenya.

It is clear from the case studies that different governments had different perceptions of the role and value of WSIS. The Indian country case study, for example, makes clear that India's Department of Telecommunications saw the summit primarily - at least during the first phase - as an opportunity to showcase India's considerable achievements in

ICTs, though the impact of this was disappointing. "The perception among senior decision makers" from other departments, the case study reports, however, "was that the agenda of WSIS was not very relevant and useful to India's aspirations from the summit." Development ministries ignored DoT's invitation to participate, and only the Ministries of Information and Broadcasting and of Information Technology responded, their sectoral agendas clashing to some degree with DoT's. Private businesses were also relatively uninvolved in official delegations, though some of the large ICT businesses based in India participated in their own right – as would be expected, given the country's international reputation for software development and other ICT services. Nevertheless, Indian businesses had nothing like the presence that Chinese businesses had, for example in the exhibition area at the Tunis summit.

Although Bangladesh starts from a much lower e-readiness base than India, its government, too, has adopted an extremely ambitious national ICT strategy, which was the focus for considerable debate around the time that WSIS was announced. It established national consultation processes, which are described in Chapter 7, though these may have caused as much confusion as enlightenment. During the second phase of the summit, however, the government of Bangladesh attained some prominence in WSIS as a whole - holding the PrepCom vice-presidency for Asia, presenting position papers for discussion, trying to coordinate LDC inputs in some areas, and - towards the end of the Internet governance negotiations during the third PrepCom of the second phase - successfully introducing new text encouraging commercial negotiation of reduced interconnection rates for LDCs and other priority countries.

National participation from Ecuador varied substantially between the two phases of the summit. During the first, the government made significant efforts to engage with different stakeholders and use their input to contribute to a national policy agenda, though, the case study reports, "despite the efforts and the political will of the stakeholders, [this process] did not allow the basic consensus needed for the formulation of a position and priorities of the country to be reached." During the second phase, the government of Ecuador was more preoccupied with its role in information society politics in Latin America, which diverted official time and resources and which also concentrated the country's approach on issues which the government felt would further its ambitions in its region.

The Ethiopian government did not attend the African regional meeting which kicked off the first phase of WSIS in May 2002, though the country was represented there by a substantial group of private sector and civil society participants. Having missed that opportunity, the Ethiopian Telecommunications Authority organised a national

32   Available from: www.apc.org/rights.apc.org/documents/
     wsis_research.

consultative workshop in early 2003, which led to the establishment of a task force and to the development of a substantial official response to the WSIS draft texts later in the year. However, this was not proactive, and a comparable position paper developed by the government during the second phase also offered little dynamic content on either development issues or the two main issues being dealt with in that phase.

According to the country case study, Ethiopia did not, therefore, play "any significant role in defining or driving the agenda and outcomes of global governance issues discussed at the Summit." Ethiopia currently gives great prominence to ICTs within development policy, but this emphasis is built around plans for improving public services rather than on issues such as affordability (which is of primary interest to civil society) or competition (which is currently very limited, but which is of great interest to the private sector). Since WSIS, the government has been reviewing its approach to ICTs in order to incorporate the Tunis agenda, but the country case study reports that this is still very much a government-led agenda.

Kenya also had a large group of participants at the first phase African meeting in Bamako in May 2002, mostly from the private sector and civil society though it also included government participants. Afterwards, Kenyan delegates recognised that they had been ill-prepared for the meeting and this recognition was crucial in the formation of a Kenya Civil Society WSIS Caucus bringing together non-governmental groups with longstanding experience of ICTs in development (see Chapter 7).

The government of Kenya was represented by the country's telecoms regulator and Geneva mission in the first WSIS phase, at least up to the final PrepCom when a civil society representative joined the team. Participation in the Geneva summit itself was much more substantial, a large multistakeholder delegation led by the vice-president creating what the country case study describes as a turning point in Kenya's subsequent approach. Shortly before the first PrepCom of the second phase, Kenya's Ministry of Transport and Communications set up a National WSIS Plan of Action Implementation Taskforce, led by the regulatory commission, which aimed to:

• Initiate structured dialogue and lay down strategies on the implementation of the WSIS Plan of action [sic]

• Articulate national common positions on the issues to be discussed in the PrepComs towards the Tunis Phase of the Summit

• Develop and implement mechanisms for coordinated national initiatives and multi-stakeholder partnerships

• Facilitate national workshops to sensitise policy makers and stakeholders on their roles in the implementation of the WSIS action plan

• Facilitate and coordinate the implementation of ICT show case initiatives and encourage the mainstreaming and integration of ICTs at the national development strategy to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).[33]

This was followed by the creation of a new alliance between Kenyan civil society and private sector organisations with an interest in ICT policy, the Kenya ICT Action Network (Kictanet). It added a new dynamic to lobbying on national ICT issues and significantly contributed to national WSIS policy.

Kenyan participation in the second phase of WSIS was substantial and substantive. The combination of WSIS with discussions on a new national ICT policy stimulated participation in the Summit, including more senior leadership than in the first phase. Participation in the Summit, in turn, the country case study suggests, improved awareness of ICT and development issues in general and in detail, improved policy coordination within government, and built solidarity between groups that had previously contested space for policy influence. However, the case study continues, limits to understanding and cohesion remained. "Careful review of the participation of public sector, civil society and private sector … shows that the engagement was not coherent and input to the WSIS issues tended to be reactive rather than proactive." Thinking about WSIS remained focused on technology rather than the national development context, and debate in Kenya still exhibited many of the deficiencies discussed in Chapter 5. "Uncritical acceptance of the WSIS process and its recommendations in Kenya," the case study concludes, "shows that there is a long way to go to influence a global debate on a wider set of issues regarding ICTs and development."

This brief summary of the evidence set out in the country case studies suggests that there was considerable variance in the experience of different developing countries in the WSIS context. Government engagement varied both between countries and, within countries, over time. Some governments were able to have significant input at different stages of the overall negotiations, but none of the country case studies reports a strongly proactive presence. WSIS was not used by any of the five countries studied as a way of pressing an important national agenda, though India's DoT clearly hoped this might be possible in the initial stages. Of the countries studied, only Kenya suggests that the impact of WSIS may result in significant change in the way that government engages with other stakeholders in policymaking or with other countries in international fora. Issues concerning multistakeholder participation in the case study countries are discussed in Chapter 7.

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33 Communications Commission of Kenya, "The World Summit for Information Society Process", www.cck.go.ke/wsis_process.

WSIS and conventional ICT decision-making

The experience of WSIS was, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, different in many ways from that in conventional ICT decision-making fora. WSIS was a one-off event, with a wide remit (if rather narrow actual debate), in which the conventions of the ITU, the WTO, ICANN and other international ICT decision-making bodies did not apply. Did interviewees for this study think that these differences enabled developing countries to participate more effectively or not in the work of WSIS – and how much difference, if any, did that make? Again, it is worth looking at this question firstly from the point of view of participation in the international events themselves; secondly from that of national policymaking; and thirdly in relation to overall WSIS outcomes.

In terms of participation, it would certainly seem that developing countries played a more forceful role in WSIS than they play in most international ICT fora. Two reasons are suggested for this:

- Firstly, the equal status afforded to all delegations gave them a stronger sense of power within the forum – and, if they chose to exercise it, an inbuilt majority. While this may also be true in theory at, for example, ITU study groups, it is rarely true in practice because few developing countries actually attend with sufficient expertise or regularity. The summit was, in this respect, more like the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, where developing country political authority can be more effectively deployed.

- Secondly, industrial countries did not consider WSIS particularly important to them and substantially downgraded their participation compared with that in other international ICT fora. The only areas in which this was not the case concerned the two major disputes during the WSIS process, on financing mechanisms and Internet governance, where industrial countries did participate more substantially in order to protect their own interests.

As a result, some international observers described developing countries as, in practice, leading much of the preparatory committee process. The voices of developing countries in WSIS were "louder" than they were in more conventional ICT fora. But were they more effective?

As with the more obviously sectoral inter-governmental negotiating fora considered in "Louder Voices", developing country participation in WSIS was led by ministries of telecommunications or their successors (a number of countries moved towards converged ministries of information technology, or the like, during the summit period). Interaction between these ministries and those responsible for other departments, particularly mainstream development

activities, appears to have been weak in most cases, and certainly in those assessed in country case studies undertaken for this project. Few countries included significant representation from these ICT-user ministries in their WSIS delegations. This finding corresponds to the poor knowledge management – the lack of "joined-up government" - within international ICT decision-making processes which was described in "Louder Voices".

Again as with the fora discussed in "Louder Voices", interviews suggested that the majority of developing countries seem to have made little effort to engage civil society and private sector voices in national debate on WSIS proposals and outcomes. While the Geneva outcome documents advocated a multistakeholder approach, this seems to have been observed as much in breach as substance. There was, for instance, little formal or informal multistakeholder consultation in four of the five countries of which case studies were undertaken for this study. Even in some industrial countries, where multistakeholder participation is more established, civil society organisations reported that arrangements for multistakeholder dialogue were weak, and that what took place was more likely to be informal dialogue than a formal part of the decision-making process. However, some countries – such as Kenya, among the case studies for this report - did experience substantial multistakeholder involvement. This represents an advance on the experience reported in "Louder Voices". It will be important to monitor whether it sets a precedent in these countries for more conventional ICT fora in the future, both national and international. The future performance of Kictanet in Kenya will be particularly interesting to observe.

Interviewees, by and large, felt that the quality of expertise available to delegations improved where multistakeholder participation took place. This is likely to have been particularly so on issues such as the Internet where governments historically have little expertise. However, the poor quality of the WSIS outcome documents, described in Chapter 5, suggests that this did not have much impact at the level of text negotiations. In fact, most delegations relied on their Geneva missions – i.e. on diplomats experienced in diplomatic rather than sectoral nuance – to negotiate these texts. The format of more conventional ICT decision-making fora is likely to be more susceptible to enhancements in the quality of inputs than summitry, and this experience need not therefore be taken as indicating what might happen if delegations at these more conventional ICT fora also took in more non-governmental expertise.

Few interviewees felt that developing countries made significant gains through WSIS, at least in terms of stated objectives. The most obvious instance here is that of the Digital Solidarity Fund. Whatever the merits of this proposal, it had strong support from a large number of developing countries during the first summit phase, and provided a significant focus for developing country solidarity. However, as

noted earlier, the DSF proposal in its initial form was simply not pursued by its sponsors during the second phase. Some alternative gains were nevertheless made as a result of the pursuit of the DSF, as described in Chapter 5.

In terms of Internet governance, as in other contexts, it is difficult to say. Developing country objectives here varied, and a distinction needs to be drawn between the majority of developing countries, on the one hand, and the small but vocal group of countries that vigorously pursued this issue. If the objective was to break United States power over the Internet, they failed. Equally, they failed if the objective was to draw the Internet more closely under the wing of an inter-governmental agency. But shifts have undoubtedly occurred in the way the Internet will be governed in the future, which are yet to be worked out (see Chapter 8). In that sense, therefore, changes might be thought to have been achieved, the extent of whose impact will only become apparent over time.

One final way of looking at this is to consider the list of 21 priorities for Africa agreed by the Bamako Bureau for submission to WSIS during the Geneva phase. These are set out in the box below.

- Infrastructure and maintenance of infrastructure and equipment
- Human resource development and capacity building
- Gender issues and women empowerment in ICTs uses
- Partnership between public and private sectors
- Debt conversion (to back up ICTs development)
- Environmental protection
- Open and free software
- National information and communication strategies with special support to the African Information Society Initiative (AISI)
- Sectoral applications
- Support to NEPAD
- Digital Solidarity Fund
- Technology transfer, particularly South to South transfer
- Research and Development
- Investment strategies
- Content development
- Internet governance
- Relations between traditional media and new ICTs
- Legislative and regulatory framework
- Intellectual property rights
- Security
- Regional cooperation

For obvious reasons, it is not possible to act on 21 priorities. Priorities must be fewer in number if they are, meaningfully, to be priorities. The length of this list reflects a failure apparent in many WSIS contexts, to prioritise issues on which political attention could be concentrated. In practice, WSIS outcome texts do have something to say on most of these issues, but in very few cases does this text represent anything new or substantial. The Digital Solidarity Fund could be regarded as, in the end, something of a failure for African engagement in WSIS, though advances were made on "infrastructure" and WSIS itself had an impact in "capacity building". It would, in short, be possible to tick boxes regarding content where many of these "priorities" were concerned, but not regarding practical outcomes. It is a matter for debate whether this was primarily due to structural weaknesses with WSIS or within continental input to it – a debate which could valuably be undertaken within Africa by governments, regional organisations, local private sector businesses and civil society organisations.

Conclusion

As discussed earlier in this report, WSIS differed significantly from conventional ICT decision-making bodies in a number of important ways. It had, for a start, a much wider remit, looking at the whole "information society" and (at least ostensibly) at the relationship of the ICT sector with non-sector-specific issues such as freedoms of expression and development policy. Its engagement with these issues, as importantly, was less prescriptive than that of other international fora. Unlike the ITU-T (the ITU Telecommunication \o "Standardization" Standardisation Sector) and ICANN, for example, WSIS was never going to draw up precise rules with lasting impact on government and business. Its decisions were at most likely to set the tone for future international discourse and national policymaking - to affect the context in which conventional ICT agencies conduct their business.

This combination of generalism and limited power had an impact on participation at a national level. Developing countries in general, and many individual developing countries in particular, participated more substantially in WSIS than they tend to do in more outcome-focused decision-making bodies. The equal status afforded all countries within the summit format gave relatively weak countries more chance to put their point of view, and gave more powerful developing countries a ready opportunity to enhance their visibility and status within the developing world and vis-à-vis industrial powers. At the same time, the generalism of much WSIS debate made it easier for delegations short of substantive expertise to play a part. Industrial countries, on the other hand, by and large felt that they had less to gain from WSIS. For them, the fact that WSIS was not able to make substantive decisions was

grounds for downgrading their presence. Not a few interviewees from such countries, for example, felt that their main objective in participation was to "prevent harm" rather than to promote a positive agenda. As a result, it would probably be true to say that developing country presence was more prominent, more visible and more substantial in comparison with industrial countries than is typically the case in ongoing negotiating fora such as the ITU - but that this resulted primarily from the lack of priority afforded WSIS by industrial countries.

Amongst developing countries themselves, a clear distinction can be drawn between the participation of developing countries in general, on the one hand, and a category of more powerful and more assertive countries, on the other. Countries in this latter category - notably China, India, Brazil and South Africa - tended to be larger, to have less difficulty in attracting foreign investment than other developing countries, and to have well-established political agendas to pursue alongside WSIS-specific issues (often to do with their relationship with the United States and/ or industrial countries in general). They acted to some degree in formal collusion but also in informal alliance or independently. Although often observed as, and sometimes presenting themselves as, articulating a general developing country perspective, their interests did not coincide closely with those of the mass of developing countries, particularly LDCs, which (for example) find it more difficult to attract investment.

The appearance of this divergence amongst developing countries - which might be characterised as one between "emerging powers" and "other developing countries, particularly LDCs" - can be tracked in a number of recent international fora, not least the Doha round of WTO negotiations. Its implications for developing country participation are not yet properly addressed, but are likely to be significant in future. They reflect a growing diversity in the economic and political characteristics of what was once called the "Third World". A more assertive bloc of emerging powers which is more powerfully engaged in international decision-making, on ICTs or other issues, does not imply any increase in the influence of LDCs, and analysis of participation will need to pay more attention to this distinction in the future.

With the exception of Internet governance bodies, and to some extent the ITU, WSIS does not appear to have had a significant impact on other international decision-making bodies concerned with ICTs, or indeed development. Most interviewees from such agencies felt that WSIS may have raised awareness of some issues that they deal with, but that it would not have a lasting effect on either their activities or their institutional structure. As noted earlier, WSIS did not break through the existing paradigm gap between ICT and development communities: it was primarily an ICT sector event, attended by ICT sector participants

and advocating an ICT sector perspective on development issues. While present, the participation of UN specialist development agencies was peripheral. Many mainstream development specialists from such organisations say they ended WSIS as sceptical about ICTs in development as they began, and even many ICD specialists within them left Tunis cynical about the degree of hype they felt it had attached to ICTs. Mainstream development agencies were, by and large, insufficiently engaged with WSIS for it to have had much impact on them institutionally.

Regional ICT institutions also had relatively little engagement with WSIS. The summit structure of regional (i.e. continental) preparatory conferences did not encourage their engagement. The European Union, as was to be expected, engaged with WSIS as a regional bloc, consistent with the Union-level lead in trade issues and the principle favouring Union-wide cohesion in hybrid negotiations. Other regional economic blocs, however, such as SADC, did not substantially discuss WSIS issues, nor did they form a major part of the agenda of regional sectoral bodies such as the African Telecommunications Union or regional regulatory associations. This was, perhaps, a weakness of the WSIS process – or of summit processes in general.

Finally, a word about the ITU – as begetter and manager of the Summit, did it also benefit in the end from playing these roles?

In many ways, the ITU is in the throes of a prolonged crisis of identity. Its historic role as international regulator of telecommunications and telecoms standards has been substantially diminished during the past thirty years - as liberalisation and globalisation have reduced the scope for international management of telecoms and the private sector has taken over the development and also, in effect, the enforcement of standards. ITU Councils and Conferences have repeatedly addressed the implications of this for the Union's role, notably (for example) incorporating private "Sector Members", but have tinkered around the edges rather than radically reforming the Union's structure. WSIS represented a major opportunity for the Union to reposition itself within the UN and international systems, one that was readily recognised by the Secretary-General and the Council. While some of the conspiracy theories advanced in other organisations about a concerted land grab by the ITU do seem exaggerated (and underestimate the ITU's internal diversity and divisions), for some within the Union and for some supporters among its member-countries, the opportunity to become lead agency for the information society and/or the Internet looked like the promised land. Other member-states, however (notably industrial countries), and private sector members, have been strongly opposed to any broadening of the ITU's role.

Institutionally, most interviewees felt, the ITU failed to make substantial gains during the WSIS process. It did not acquire new roles where the Internet is concerned. In fact,

opposition to its doing so may have hardened within industrial countries and civil society during WSIS, though support remains significant among some former communist and developing countries. The nature of future Internet governance is not resolved, however, and the ITU will continue to bid for a more substantial role. Overall, the WSIS experience might be considered an opportunity for the ITU to reposition itself which has left it still uncertain where and how to reposition. Debate on this continued at the Union's 2006 Plenipotentiary Conference.

In assessing developing country participation in international organisations, especially where ICTs are concerned, it is important not to confuse two separate issues: the influence of developing countries within ICT decision bodies; and the influence of ICT decision-making bodies over the ICT sector. The latter is concerned with the scope of international governance of ICTs; the former with the balance between developing and industrial countries in decision-making of whatever scope.

In practice, the two are often confused (not least by interviewees for this project). Developing countries tend to want to gain both more influence in decision-making bodies vis-à-vis industrial countries (a question of balance) and more influence for decision-making bodies over international developments (a question of scope). This reflects their relative weakness both internationally and nationally: rebalancing would increase the weight of attention paid to their concerns, while increased scope would support enhanced government authority and capacity to manage domestic markets. Industrial countries and the private sector tend to want a reduction in the decision-making powers of international bodies (global deregulation), but

are divided over rebalancing: some (or at least some parts of some) governments see rebalancing as a question of international justice (of significance to smaller industrial countries as much as developing ones); others are concerned about the risk of technical dilution or politicisation of decisions which should be taken on pragmatic or purely technical grounds. Civil society organisations, meanwhile, tend to favour rebalancing in favour of developing countries (on grounds of international equity) but also a reduction in the powers of inter-governmental organisations (distrusting organisations which are dominated by governments and unexposed to multistakeholder participation).

On balance, few interviewees felt that WSIS had significantly changed the balance of power or likely outcomes of forthcoming negotiations in other ICT decision-making fora, with the obvious exception of those concerned with Internet governance (which is discussed in Chapter 8). The ITU's World Telecommunication Development Conference in March 2006 spent a good deal of time discussing the implications of WSIS and placed its Development Bureau's workplan for the coming four years firmly in its wake – but it has fewer, not more resources to devote to ICT for development (ICT4D). WSIS action line follow-up meetings have attracted little interest (as described in Chapter 8). WSIS is no longer on the tip of people's tongues at international ICT gatherings. The networks it created are dissipating (apart from those on Internet governance). Its outcomes simply do not have enough to say about what other ICT fora should be doing. The evidence from those who participated in this study suggests that WSIS is unlikely to have a lasting impact on other international ICT fora, and that the conclusions of the "Louder Voices" study remain as valid as they were four years ago. ▪

WSIS and civil society

Civil society participation in international summit processes is always controversial. The United Nations system is predicated on the unique authority of governments. Governments are understood, de facto and de iure, to represent those they govern. Although they are highly variable in practice, the legitimacy and accountability of governments are assumed because for inter-governmental institutions to challenge them, except in the most extreme and universally agreed of cases, would jeopardise the fabric of international discourse (and, many would say, the stability of international relations). Governments therefore speak, within the UN system and most other international organisations, for their nations and their citizens; and many governments, throughout the period since 1945, have been very jealous of their unique authority to do so. (This differs, of course, from the situation in national governance, where national governments share decision-making authority with local government, with the judiciary, with parliamentary bodies, with a variety of semi-autonomous quasi-governmental organisations, and with a wide range of other social actors including civil society organisations.)

One United Nations agency, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), has a different tradition. It inherited a multistakeholder character from its pre-1945 (League of Nations) structure, one in which representatives of governments, employers and trade unions collectively negotiate and determine ILO decisions. In a very formal sense, this represents a different way of looking at the state – seeing it more as a partnership between different interest groups with contesting perspectives out of which consensus may be reached. This reflects, at an international level, the balance of governance authority that pertains between different institutions - legal, social and economic, as well as political - within nation-states. Similar "social partnership" arrangements exist, though with limited effect, within the European Union and some other international organisations.

It is difficult to envisage today's nation-states agreeing as formal a multistakeholder arrangement as the ILO, but the structural difference between it and other UN agencies points to the growing significance of stakeholder diversity in contemporary national and international discourse. The ILO structure sought to replicate at international level a national division between the state and opposite sides of its specialist relationship, workers and employers. It assumed three distinct relationships within this triangle: between the state and employers, often but not quite the same as

private business; between the state and organised labour – trade unions, a component of what is now called civil society; and between the representatives of business and of workers (the private sector and trade unions).

Multistakeholderism is the concept of decision-making which formally engages not just governments but also other stakeholder groups within society. Typically, at a national level, it implies the formal (as well as informal) engagement of the business community (the "private sector") and of organisations representing groups within the community ("civil society") as well as government. At an international level, inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) are added to the mix. This is seen by many governments as a challenge to their authority and status as the legal representatives of their people; as a national sovereignty question concerning relations within the nation comparable with, say, the external national sovereignty questions raised by membership of the European Union or by ICANN's role in respect of Internet domains. Some governments, however, see it as an opportunity to harness the support and expertise of the community as a whole to improve the responsiveness of government, the quality of decision-making and the implementation of government services. This interpretation recognises that neither appointed officials nor periodic elections are good at capturing the diversity of concerns and needs within society, and that incorporating the private sector and civil society in decision-making can improve the quality of government (and perhaps the likelihood of re-election). This "liberal" approach to multistakeholderism, within the country, is not surprisingly more often found in democratic than authoritarian states.

Multistakeholderism at an international level adds another dimension to this question, which might be described as "governmental confidence". Governments which are confident of their status with their citizens (which may mean governmental systems rather than individual governments) are more likely to choose to include a wider range of stakeholders in national representation abroad. Governments which are confident of their status both within their own countries and within the international community are more likely to welcome formal multistakeholder participation in international fora. Correspondingly, governments which feel insecure at home – because they lack democratic legitimacy, because the authority of government has been historically weak, because they represent the victors of civil conflict or particular vested interest

groups – or insecure abroad – because they are small, militarily or economically vulnerable, ideologically at odds with mainstream opinion, emerging from international conflict: these governments are less likely to include stakeholder diversity in representing themselves to other nations, and less likely to welcome scrutiny from stakeholders other than their peers in international fora, especially human rights activists and other civil society groups.

Nevertheless, the past thirty years or so have seen two trends in the balance of relations between the three national stakeholder categories (government, the private sector and civil society). Firstly, the neoliberal consensus in economic policy – the preponderance of free market economics, particularly since the fall of communism at the beginning of the 1990s - has increased the economic power and the role and influence of the private sector vis-à-vis the state, and particularly that of multinational and international companies. Secondly, civil society organisations have grown increasingly critical of the representativeness of government and more assertive about their capacity to articulate alternative citizens' perspectives - particularly those of marginalised groups such as the poor, landless, indigenous peoples and, most significantly, women.

These processes have been important at both national and international levels. The influence of business has increased in most countries, particularly post-communist and developing countries, and that of multinational businesses has also increased in international trade and investment – especially in the telecommunications sector, where privatisation and liberalisation have led to the appearance of major telecoms corporations investing in many countries. Civil society organisations have increasingly represented themselves as supplements to formal democratic institutions in democratic states and as alternative forms of democratic representation where formal democracy is weak. Their involvement has been highly diverse - coming from a wide variety of organisations and alliances with a wide range of social and political perspectives and of representational scope.

The balance between the two principles represented here - of governmental sovereignty on the one hand, and of representational diversity on the other - has been debated within the United Nations system for many years. The UN system is, of course, built around governments. It does not formally distinguish between categories of non-governmental actor - private sector and civil society organisations have the same formal identity within the UN system. However, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) provides a consultative process for accredited NGOs, of which there are now over 2700 (though these obviously represent only a small proportion of civil society stakeholders). ECOSOC has in effect provided a limited safety valve for the growing pressure from civil society for more substantial participation in UN (and other international)

decision-making. However, many governments remain suspicious of the representativeness, in particular, of civil society – in terms of both its social composition and political ideology.

Summits have provided a particular focus for contention over multistakeholder participation. Summits are inter-governmental events: it is governments that decide the content of final texts, by which governments (if anyone) are bound. Access to discussion about texts - to participation in PrepComs and Summit meetings themselves - has been jealously guarded by governments (though not all have been adamant about this), and very little space has been given to any non-governmental actors within formal summit proceedings. This has not prevented non-governmental actors from making themselves heard. After all, many of the issues discussed by summits – sustainable development, for one example; the "information society" for another – require action by the private sector and communities as well as governments if change is going to come.

Some governments, particularly in the North, have been prepared to include private sector and (sometimes) civil society participants in their official delegations (though this usually means that these participants are bound by collective responsibility, i.e. tied to the official delegation line rather than pursuing that of their own CSO or CSOs in general). In the corridors, meeting rooms and coffee bars of every summit, unattached private sector and civil society representatives have also caucused, lobbied and interacted with official delegates willing to listen to or put across their point of view. At summit after summit, civil society organisations have organised alternative events, sometimes called alternative summits or NGO fora, at which alternative viewpoints are expressed, debated and alternative declarations agreed, which can be juxtaposed against the decisions reached in the formal summit process.

Summits, in other words, have had formally constrained but informally extensive non-governmental participation for many years. Recent summits have also seen increasing space granted to civil society participation within their formal proceedings, normally mediated via ECOSOC, as perception of the value of civil society engagement has increased within government delegations and the UN bureaucracy. The following paragraphs consider WSIS in this context: firstly in terms of civil society experience in participation and organisation; then, in terms of content and the key issues that preoccupied civil society participants. The chapter ends by reviewing the implications of the WSIS experience for future multistakeholder involvement.

Civil society participation

WSIS was, as has been noted repeatedly in this report, not an entirely normal summit – it was a UN-style summit rather than a UN summit per se; a summit organised by

the ITU with support from other UN agencies rather than by officials from the United Nations itself. This may have created a different space for non-governmental actors to be represented. In any event, almost all interviewees with experience of other summits agreed that private sector and civil society participation in the formal summit proceedings of WSIS substantially exceeded that in those previous summits. A civil society bureau was established early in the preparatory stages of the first summit phase to incorporate civil society participation, and was accommodated within the secretariat structure set up by the ITU. It was intended to parallel the inter-governmental bureau's role in process (but not content) matters. In practice, the civil society bureau was, by all accounts, substantially left to its own devices to organise civil society participation, not least because the ITU lacked experience of civil society organisations and their ways of working. Meanwhile, civil society participants in WSIS set up their own coordinating structures, including a "Content and Themes Group" to coordinate the work of diverse caucuses, working groups and other content-oriented partnerships that were established by civil society organisations.[34]

During the formal summit processes themselves - though this was, at times, in the teeth of resistance from some governments - civil society and private sector representatives were able to make formal presentations in PrepComs and plenary sessions. They undoubtedly influenced areas of the final texts agreed by WSIS, partly through this formal presence, more substantially through lobbying and alliances formed and pursued outside the formal meeting rooms. They had more impact on the Declaration of Principles in Geneva than on the Plan of Action; more in Tunis on Internet governance than on infrastructure investment - though, in this latter case, some impact on both. Private sector and civil society actors also played significant roles in influencing some of the more specific content negotiated between delegations, on subjects such as child protection and gender equity. However, they had little involvement in discussion of texts concerning implementation of the development agenda. They also argued (not least amongst each other) on a number of topics (such as the relationship between proprietary and open source software).

Civil society organisation was – perhaps inevitably given the nature of the summit process – sometimes less than coherent and often reactive rather than proactive. CONGO, the formal association of NGOs associated with the UN system, played more of a role in trying to achieve organisational coherence during the second phase than it had played in the first, but, as noted elsewhere in this chapter, the limited thematic scope of the second phase made it less easy to bring the whole of civil society together behind a common agenda that mattered to all involved.

During PrepComs, civil society organisations met in plenary during the morning, while their Content and Themes Group met each evening. Much of the time of these discussions was spent on administrative and political questions, rather than debating substantive issues (which were more substantially dealt with in caucuses and informal discussion). Some participants complained that these regular meetings were dominated by relatively few voices and that they offered little scope for newcomers to get involved. The political tensions raised by the presence of Tunisian organisations with questionable NGO credentials made civil society organisation more difficult during the second phase – especially around the time of the Hammamet PrepCom in early 2005 - to a degree that caused confusion and anger among many who had participated within civil society during the earlier summit period.

There was, meanwhile, no large-scale alternative event organised at WSIS in the sense that has occurred at other recent summits – for example, the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit. While some outside events did take place in Geneva and Tunis – there was, for example, some effort to organise events in solidarity with excluded Tunisian civil society during the second summit – these were small, entirely unlike the very substantial event in Johannesburg. In spite of the problems, in short, non-governmental actors were able to find more space to engage in the activities that most interested them within the perimeter of WSIS than in other summits, and this was sufficient to retain them inside the WSIS tent rather than taking up a space without. Three explanations were put forward for this by civil society interviewees and others with experience of summits.

One explanation, discussed to some extent earlier in this report, is that the ITU simply did not know how to handle civil society involvement, having no prior experience of it in its own events and no statutory provision of its own for including them comparable with the sector membership available to businesses. While more liberal towards the private sector, therefore – at least to the ICT-oriented private sector – the ITU has been less liberal towards NGOs. When it came to organising WSIS, the ITU had far less experience of handling relations with civil society organisations than other UN agencies. This inexperience may have led it to be more open, particularly given the pressures put on it to make WSIS less technological and more developmental, in the fear of being seen to be more restrictive than others thought necessary.

The second explanation is simply that the greater space which was offered to civil society by the WSIS Secretariat to (at least) explore participation sufficiently changed the balance of advantage for many civil society organisations between participating from within the tent and from without to make the latter option insufficiently attractive to enough organisations that might want to put an alternative together. If the tent was more welcoming, then maybe it

34   See www.wsis-cs.org/cs-overview.html.

was worth a look inside. And once inside, the potential for achieving things there looked better than going out into the rain. Many civil society participants put a lot of effort into achieving this outcome.

The third view expressed by interviewees is that perhaps the issue of the "information society" was insufficiently attractive in itself to a wide enough range of civil society organisations for them to want to organise a big alternative. WSIS just was not important enough for the major social movements, in other words – and this may have been particularly so precisely because it was, in Kofi Annan's terms, an opportunity rather than a problem. The "information society" did not inspire the same kind of antagonism as global warming or women's disenfranchisement. This interpretation is strengthened, perhaps, by the fact that WSIS also attracted no significant anti-globalisation protests, not even protests like those that occurred when the G8 set up its Digital Opportunity Task Force in Okinawa in 2000. Neither Geneva nor Tunis needed to protect themselves against the kind of demonstrations seen in Seattle in 1999 or Genoa in 2001.

This is not to say that greater space for civil society input meant great space for it. The participation of non-governmental actors in the formal WSIS process was highly contested as soon as the first preparatory committee began in May 2002. A number of governments - notably those of China and Pakistan - objected vehemently to any presence of non-governmental actors in the PrepComs' formal spaces. Arguments over representation took up a large proportion of the time of the first PrepCom (and added to the scepticism of some participants, for example in development agencies, about the value of the summit). The presence of the private sector was just as strongly opposed by hostile governments as was that of civil society - and, indeed, common cause over their exclusion helped to bring civil society and private sector representatives into closer dialogue than, interviewees suggest, had been the case at previous summits. The fact that ICT private sector businesses were accustomed to participation in ITU discussions probably increased their dissatisfaction at attempts to exclude them from comparable WSIS meetings.

The division of governmental opinion here, to a significant degree, coincided with that on issues of freedom of expression. Most of the governments which supported civil society participation were from industrial countries; most of those that opposed it were from developing countries - though there were governments in both groups that bucked this trend. In practice, however, the consensus that was reached did allow more space for non-governmental presentations within formal proceedings than was the case at previous summits. The formal position was that:

> Participants from accredited civil society entities (including NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC) and from accredited business sector entities (including ITU

sector members) were allowed to sit as observers in public meetings (plenary and subcommittee meetings in the preparatory process, Plenary and committee meetings in the Summit). Upon the invitation of the presiding officer of the body concerned, and subject to the approval of that body, such observers were allowed to make oral statements on questions in which they had special competence. If the number of requests to speak was too large, the civil society and business sector entities were requested to form themselves into constituencies, which then spoke through their respective spokespersons.[35]

A number of governments, including both industrial and developing country governments, also made a point of including private sector and civil society representatives within their formal delegations (although, as noted above, this did not mean that they could express positions contrary to those of the delegations that included them, and some such delegates expressed the feeling that their presence in delegations was tokenistic, that they had little real say in how their delegations behaved).

For all the caveats, this set of circumstances represented a gain in participatory space for non-governmental actors beyond what might have been expected from experience at previous summits, and one of some symbolic importance. Civil society organisations had more opportunity to express a view in formal sessions than beforehand. The extent to which this might set a precedent for future multistakeholder participation is considered towards the end of this chapter.

Whether this participatory gain made a difference to negotiations - either at the time or subsequently – depends, obviously, on the use made of it and the attention paid to it. Opinion among interviewees here is divided. The space and time allocated to civil society contributions was not great, and its allocation by the civil society plenary (on which, see below) could, therefore, be contentious. There was an obvious tendency for civil society speakers to try to cover more issues than they had time available to say something substantive about. The attention paid to speakers during PrepCom and (especially) plenary sessions was also highly variable. At times, for example during the tenser moments of negotiations such as those on Internet governance, most delegations (as in most summits) paid close attention to anything that was germane to these (and little to anything that was not). In plenary, however, and in much of the negotiation process, contributions from delegates are often repetitive, and delegates in the audience pay scant attention to them, spending their time instead in conversation, reading, preparing their own inputs or doing emails. The ambience of summits - very large conference arenas, distant speakers usually inaudible (in any language) without headphones, simultaneous interpretation, the ready

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35 "The multi-stakeholder participation in WSIS and its written and unwritten rules", at www.itu.int/wsis/basic/multistakeholder.html.

opportunity for one-to-one discussions outside the formal meeting space - also discourages attention to what is being said from the platform or the podium. It is critical, therefore, for speakers to be able to attract attention if they want notice to be taken of them; and this is as much a matter of demagogic style as it is of content. On the whole, interviewees felt that the diversity of civil society representation increased the attention paid to civil society speakers and that many of the points they made were, at least, registered by delegations. Private sector speaking slots were less diversified, and interviewees suggested that, while the points made in them were well-argued, this lack of diversity meant that delegations paid less attention to them as the summit process continued.

The availability of speaking slots is not, however, the most important locus for civil society contributions to the development of summit outcomes. This depends much more on the effectiveness of what amounts to lobbying activity: seeking to influence the thinking of national delegates who have the power to commit their countries or to use their countries' influence within negotiations in pursuit of particular objectives. Lobbying is a highly skilled activity in any context, and its effectiveness depends on a number of factors, particularly:

- The saliency of issues to both "patron" (in this case national delegation) and "client" (lobbyist) - and the level of risk to other objectives of the patron involved in promoting a particular position on the issue concerned.

- The level of understanding of those issues in both parties, especially the sophistication of understanding by lobbyists.

- The reliability (in terms of facts) and trustworthiness (in terms of honest and open dealing) in each party's perception of the other.

- The political skills and capacity for political judgement of lobbyists, in particular at identifying effective points of entry into the debate, and at knowing when to hold back or retreat from exposed positions.

Most of these are at least as much personal as organisational skills, and a great deal of the success or failure of lobbying depends on individual personalities being able to forge alliances of common interest which are sustainable over the period of time required to pursue an issue. The effectiveness of lobbying is greatest where these skills are brought to bear by a coherent and skilful team of lobbyists on a coherent partnership of delegations which have other common interests to pursue – though individuals can also make a significant difference.

Interviews for this project confirm the importance of all these observations on the WSIS process. There were, to begin with, a number of policy areas in which civil society organisations were able to build substantive coalitions with important national delegations. During the first phase of the summit, for example, civil society organisations concerned with rights issues shared common objectives with the European Union and its member-states in maintaining the integrity of established human rights principles within the proposed outcome documents. During the second phase, civil society input proved important in securing agreement on the Internet Governance Forum, and civil society language made up a good deal of that defining its remit. Some specialist civil society organisations also proved very effective at focused lobbying on their particular issues, notably child protection agencies which significantly increased awareness and secured substantive language addressing their concerns. While the ultimate value of this language depends on its impact on implementation, these agencies will in future be able to point to this language as affirmation of their cause by the international community.

WSIS illustrated an anomaly here which civil society finds in many international negotiations and which results from differences in the objectives pursued by different stakeholder groups. Civil society and private sector bodies are more able to achieve sustainable partnerships with governments that broadly endorse their presence in negotiations. On the whole, industrial (donor) countries are more positive towards participation of this kind, not least because they are more experienced with it at home. However, civil society's objectives often involve promoting the policy positions of developing countries which are at odds with those of industrial or donor governments – usually from a sense of ideological commitment, sometimes merely from one of solidarity. In the first phase of WSIS, for example, civil society broadly supported the Digital Solidarity Fund proposal. It was donor countries – which opposed it – that were, in practice much more supportive of civil society organisations' participation in negotiations than the international community in general, however, while the most vociferous opponents of civil society involvement included important developing countries such as China and Pakistan.

An alternative way of looking at this is in terms of the different issues that are prioritised by different stakeholders. Opponents of civil society involvement in WSIS generally opposed it from a viewpoint that emphasises government authority over citizens' rights. There is therefore a sense in which the anomaly can as readily be expressed in terms of civil society interests: in a juxtaposition between civil society concern for development, for example (which tends to imply alliance with developing countries and, not necessarily on the same basis, with the more development-oriented donors) and civil society concern with rights (where their objectives are generally closer to those of industrial country governments and may be vigorously opposed by some developing countries). Different civil

society organisations prioritise rights and development issues differently. Some interviewees suggested the caucus process and the general ethos of much civil society debate discourage open discussion on these dichotomies and their implications for how civil society organisations function within decision-making fora.

While this distinction should certainly not be considered anything so crude as a division between industrial and developing countries, therefore, it does mean that civil society organisations find it easier organisationally to partner with individual industrial countries and with specific industrial country blocs (such as the European Union) than with comparable blocs of developing countries, even where these countries and blocs are opposing important policy positions they espouse (such as the Digital Solidarity Fund).

Much civil society activity within and around summits takes place through caucuses, i.e. semi-formal associations of organisations and activists that have broadly common interests. These caucuses became prominent during the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995, and have featured in many of its successors. Their purpose is to draw together diverse entities in a formation through which they can develop common positions and promote these with greater critical mass. Membership is generally open to all organisations which are recognisably civil society in character and which wish to take part in them. Caucuses also help to build shared awareness and understanding within civil society. The networks generated by this may have more lasting value, though (at least before WSIS) caucuses themselves were usually formed for individual summits rather than as longer-term alliances.

Given this purpose, and their significance as foci for organisation, the representativeness and coherence of caucuses not surprisingly have substantial impact on the effectiveness of the lobbying process described above. In principle, the caucus process could work in very different ways:

- It could help to build a relatively powerful consensus, increasing the commitment of civil society in general to focus on causes promoted by groups within civil society (in the case of WSIS, for example, to support the inclusion of language concerning child protection).

- Alternatively, it could tend to reduce the range of issues covered and points made concerning them to a lowest common denominator on which general agreement can be reached – like WSIS itself, therefore, avoiding areas of conflict in pursuit of greater consensus.

Interviewees reported the experience of WSIS as being rather mixed. The caucus process was generally felt to have worked well during the first summit phase, with civil society as a whole building up substantial esprit de corps as its right to participate was challenged. Some caucuses needed time to create a working atmosphere – there were,

for example, tensions in the Internet Governance caucus between those with primarily Internet and those with primarily civil society backgrounds; and over the need to represent the whole Internet-using community as well as those with specialist expertise. Interviewees do suggest, however, that the regional and thematic caucus structures never really gelled, and that Northern and Southern CSOs tended to maintain different priorities throughout.

During the second phase, the caucus system worked less effectively and civil society behaved in a much less cohesive way. Interviewees reported that a few specialist caucuses continued to have a powerful impact, for example the Internet Governance Caucus and that on child protection. There was, however, much less cohesion at the overall civil society level; and more divisions were apparent within civil society, for example over issues like the emphasis that should be given to free and open source software.

One reason for this difference, interviewees agreed, was the disruptive impact of participation by a large number of Tunisian organisations, the genuineness of whose civil society credentials was challenged by many that had been involved during the first phase. More established international NGOs tended to regard these Tunisian organisations as interlopers, suspiciously close to their government and certainly remote from the "excluded" Tunisian rights organisations and other NGOs that bore the brunt of government suppression. Many civil society participants felt that this "Tunisian factor" undermined the openness of discussion during caucus meetings and made them less productive fora for deciding strategy, with the latter migrating from caucus room to coffee shop.

Interviewees also felt that the concentration of issues during the second summit also undermined the effectiveness of the caucus system. With Internet governance by far the most important item on the agenda, there was not a great deal other than Internet governance on which to caucus – at least where text was concerned (arrangements for WSIS follow-up were also of significant interest). The overall civil society caucus therefore lost focus on issues, becoming more of an organisational tool and therefore of less interest to many potential participants. More differences, political as much as ideological, were observable between components of individual caucuses – for example between Anglophone and Francophone members of the African civil society caucus.

A greater difference was also suggested during the second phase between those civil society organisations whose instincts were to cooperate or work within the WSIS process and those more keen to criticise its outcomes. To some extent, this could be observed in differences of view between civil society actors concerning the Digital Solidarity Fund and the report of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms.

In a few cases, during the second phase, caucus organisation also became more formal. The African civil society caucus, for example, sought to establish an institutional structure of a kind more like that which might have been expected from African governments. Formalisation of this kind, some suggested, turns a caucus into a committee, a structure of a different kind with, usually, a different kind of purpose: more of a permanent institution than a temporary alliance, something of which organisations might seek to be members rather than simply to attend. The implications of this possible development of the caucus structure are considered again towards the end of this chapter.

Participation in caucuses and PrepComs built one level of networking between civil society organisations that were particularly concerned with WSIS issues – especially those concerned with issues of information rights. A further dimension of WSIS activity that was particularly important to civil society was the exhibition space and informal summit held at each WSIS summit session. The exhibition space and the very wide range of workshops, seminars, discussion fora and presentation sessions associated with it offered a wider range of networking opportunities to a wider range of civil society organisations. This informal summit drew in more development NGOs in particular – mostly those with specific ICD projects or programmes but also some more mainstream organisations.

The exhibition space in Tunis was significantly different from that in Geneva. In the first summit, the ICT4D Platform, sponsored by the Swiss Development Corporation, had a strongly developmental character, including both donor agencies and NGOs. Many NGOs with ICD programmes saw it as an opportunity to showcase these. Spaces for semi-formal workshop sessions around the periphery were oversubscribed, and these were complemented by further sessions held within the exhibition area, many of them by civil society NGOs. The atmosphere at times was febrile, as interested visitors, without passes to the (somewhat isolated) plenary itself, gorged themselves on the variety of inputs available - which often (though not always) had a strong advocacy component. The exhibition space in Tunis was more like those associated with major ITU trade conferences, such as the "Telecom" events held annually in different geographical regions. A higher proportion of stands were occupied by businesses promoting technological solutions (including, notably, a strong presence from the Chinese business sector); a lower proportion from development agencies and NGOs. The semi-formal workshop programme, however, was still dynamic, with substantial coordinated programmes of sessions organised by bodies such as the Global Knowledge Partnership. Although the atmosphere around these was less frantic, interviewees felt that the quality of many meetings was very high, and often more analytical than had been the case in Geneva. The understanding of ICT issues in these workshops certainly exceeded that in the main WSIS process, and

many civil society delegates, particularly those not involved in caucusing, found it the most useful part of the whole WSIS experience.

But we have not so far considered who was there. Civil society is immensely diverse. It is defined essentially by what it excludes - inter-governmental organisations, governments and private businesses – which implies that it includes everything else – from peasants' organisations and trade unions; through women's groups, faith groups, etcetera; perhaps to include political parties, academics, more amorphous "social movements". "Civil society", in other words, is arguably not defined by its objectives, like governments ("to rule") or businesses ("to make profit for shareholders"), but bounded by the fact that it does not share those objectives. It is therefore likely to be much more fractured than these other stakeholder groups - politically, socially, culturally, geographically, ideologically. While its fractures are obviously recognised by civil society actors, the ethos of civil society engagement in international institutions, where the value of common objectives is self-evident, tends to obscure them. This has often caused problems for civil society representation, and instability in civil society coalitions.

So which parts of civil society were represented in the PrepComs, in Geneva and in Tunis? A paradigm gap similar – but not identical – to that found in government delegations can be found in civil society representation.

Firstly, civil society participation in WSIS was constrained by a number of "access" factors. Even the best-funded international NGOs found it difficult to resource participation in the paraphernalia of WSIS – PrepComs and regional conferences requiring high travel and accommodation costs, websites and listservs to coordinate activity, staff time diverted from other work. These cost factors disproportionately affected developing country civil society organisations, which are poor in comparison with their industrial country peers. Some fellowship resources were available for NGOs, but these were limited, and it was difficult – as the "Louder Voices" study found with government representatives – for organisations to achieve continuity of presence throughout the WSIS process. Wealthier Northern CSOs were therefore more substantially represented at WSIS than poorer Southern CSOs; and Northern CSOs played a more prominent part in civil society caucusing than their Southern counterparts. While they were conscious of this and made considerable efforts to compensate for it, CSO activists were unable to prevent some hostile developing country governments from claiming that civil society represented a Northern, not a Southern perspective.

As well as being geographically unequal, the composition of civil society representation also failed to reflect fully the diverse areas of interest of civil society organisations that might have played a part. There were perhaps three main types of civil society organisation whose presence might

have been expected and which might have substantial expertise to contribute to the issues debated in the summit: organisations primarily concerned with a) rights; b) ICT issues, including the Internet; and c) development. In practice, however, organisations concerned primarily with ICTs were much more substantially and actively present than mainstream organisations concerned with either rights or development issues.[36]

Two reasons were suggested for this. Firstly, ICTs offer substantial new space for the expression of opinion and for networking between individuals and civil society organisations. Control over this space is contested, particularly in authoritarian states, by governments and citizens/dissidents/opponents. The fact that much early Internet development was led by people with an anti-establishment perspective has contributed to this debate. As a result, the Internet and ICTs were already central to the concerns of a significant group of information rights CSOs when WSIS was announced. A similar case obviously applies to ICT-focused organisations, including those using ICTs in development activity, since they have directly chosen to work within this area. But the second reason suggested for the disparity in representation by organisational type is really the converse of the first. ICTs do not have the same powerful resonance for mainstream rights and development NGOs that they have within the ICT/Internet communities. As with the official development community, in particular, the value of ICTs in development is still contentious; in fact, wariness of ICTs is probably greater in development NGOs, which have an even stronger focus on poverty reduction than official donors. Few mainstream development sector NGOs, therefore, were present in Geneva or Tunis; and none played a significant part in WSIS' discussion of ICTs and development. The impact this had on civil society's contribution to this debate is discussed later in this chapter.

Some countries, both Northern and Southern, included civil society representatives in their national delegations. Ecuador, among the country case studies for this report, was one example. Such representatives did not always find it easy. Some expressed the feeling that they were being used as tokens. Others felt constrained by the principle of collective responsibility, which meant that they were unable to express their organisation's point of view, certainly in WSIS sessions and sometimes even within delegation meetings.

The likelihood of civil society participation in national delegations reflected the likelihood of participation in national fora discussing WSIS issues. This varied substantially between countries.

Within industrial countries, a reasonably high degree of multistakeholder participation in policy dialogue has become relatively common. Relevant private sector organisations, for example, are often routinely included in delegations to the ITU. Discussion with civil society organisations involved in both development policy and rights issues is part of normal practice. A routine culture of multistakeholder engagement obviously offered opportunities for civil society organisations of all types to have an input into national policy development on WSIS-related issues. This did not always lead to substantial formal consultation: in Britain, for example, formal consultation consisted of sparsely attended meetings organised by the British Council in the run-up to each WSIS summit. However, British CSOs did not, by their own evidence, feel excluded from WSIS discussions because they were able (and encouraged) to make their input through the normal channels that they had available. Experience varied in different industrial countries, but CSOs could usually make their voices heard.

Experience in developing countries was more diverse. Some national delegations to WSIS from developing countries included CSOs, but this varied substantially. The majority of delegations had no civil society representatives at all. A small number of countries, however – such as South Africa – made a point of including civil society participants, and some also included these in PrepComs. These countries, not surprisingly, were among those that had implemented more extensive multistakeholder consultation as part of their WSIS preparations.

As discussed in Chapter 6, five country case studies concerning national WSIS policymaking processes were undertaken for this project – in Bangladesh, Ecuador, Ethiopia, India and Kenya. In each of these countries, some effort was made by government to engage with other stakeholders in preparing for WSIS, though only one case study – that in Kenya – suggests that this may lead to lasting change in policymaking processes.

In India, the process of engagement in WSIS was led by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), which initially saw the summit as an opportunity to promote Indian business interests. According to the case study, DoT "had a narrow view of the scope and participants that could play a leading role," initially restricting its invitations to contribute to other government departments and the private sector, and excluding NGOs, the media and other entities. Response to its invitations was insubstantial, even within government. Though business associations did play some part in formal consultation, their contribution was never great.

The case study suggests that few Indian NGOs have been involved in national policymaking on ICTs or have substantial expertise in this area. India's history of statism, it is suggested, may be partly responsible for the weakness of

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36 Though not entirely so: Amnesty International, Christian Aid and Plan International were among mainstream rights and development NGOs attending the Tunis summit.

civil society in this area. Nevertheless, a number of Indian civil society organisations attended PrepCom and plenary sessions of the summit, though none were included in the official consultation processes - themselves pretty insubstantial - that were held by DoT. Indian civil society respondents felt that they were able to contribute on some issues through civil society caucuses, including Internet governance and gender issues, and to some degree to raise awareness of Indian civil society concerns with policymakers. However, as in other countries, they report that their participation was constrained by lack of financial resources.[37]

Bangladesh's participation in WSIS was led by the Ministry of Science and Information Technology, which made some efforts to engage with the private sector and civil society in policy development. In late 2002, the government set up a Working Group on WSIS with representatives from relevant ministries, the private sector, the media and civil society, with a secretariat based in the country's telecommunications regulatory commission. However, the country case study suggests that this Working Group was insufficiently inclusive, with limited private sector participation and no opportunity for non-invited NGOs to play a part. As a result, "some of the major NGOs such as Grameen Bank or BRAC, who also have a stake in ICT areas, had little or no participation in the WSIS activities in the country." A second, apparently overlapping, consultation and policy development process was set up by the Ministry of Science and Information Technology.

Civil society may have been more engaged in Bangladesh than India, though it was likewise constrained by financial difficulties. A number of civil society organisations participated in official working groups and/or undertook their own initiatives. Along with APC and OneWorld South Asia, the Bangladesh Working Group on WSIS organised a South Asian regional consultation meeting in January 2005. The input from this conference was submitted to relevant regional bodies. Unusually, one consultation forum for civil society within Bangladesh was held outside the capital, in Khulna, though the country case study suggests that this was more of an awareness-raising exercise than a truly consultative event.[38]

Efforts were also made by the government in Ecuador to draw the private sector and civil society into a multistakeholder dialogue. The National Telecommunications Council, responsible for coordination of the country's WSIS participation, began to convene multistakeholder workshops nationally and provincially from around the beginning of 2003 with the aim of guiding national input into WSIS

issues. "These initiatives," the case study reports, "opened new possibilities to tighten the government-civil society relationship, ... although not always with effective, specific and efficient results." The process faced multiple difficulties - for example due to changes in the government team responsible, varying quality of knowledge of ICT issues and uncertain financial resources to support involvement by Ecuador in regional and global WSIS meetings. "It was," the study concludes, "an uneven, staggered process with random and poorly-timed calls for participation that lacked clear coordinating roles and attempted to introduce participatory multisectoral working methodologies. Despite the efforts and the political will of the stakeholders, it did not allow the basic consensus needed for the formulation of a position and priorities of the country to be reached."

This national discourse vanished from the scene for twelve months after the Geneva summit and, when reactivated in January 2005 to provide input to the second PrepCom of the second phase, it was more clearly dominated by government officials. Government participation in the second phase of WSIS was therefore better, while that of other stakeholders was less substantial. Although civil society delegates were included in Ecuador's national delegation in Tunis, these reported finding that they were unable to play a significant civil society role as delegation members.

Civil society organisations in Ecuador report feeling that, while WSIS opened space for multistakeholder participation, including better access to government officials, "the benefits of multistakeholder alliances were circumstantial and not always effective." Relatively few civil society organisations participated in the WSIS dialogue: "Some actors only participated in the initial stage of the first phase in Geneva and experienced ... disenchantment; others persevered until Tunis, with certain periods of more intense participation. Some limited their participation to national dynamics, others to regional and global ones, and a few to both." The picture, in other words, was mixed, but, overall, relationships between civil society and other stakeholders were insufficiently developed to maximise the potential WSIS offered. Lack of resources, as elsewhere, also hindered civil society involvement. Private sector engagement was, meanwhile, "sporadic, isolated and unplanned." Media debate was conspicuous by its absence.[39]

As noted in Chapter 6, the government of Ethiopia did not attend the Bamako regional meeting which initiated African participation in the first phase of WSIS in 2002. However, this conference was attended by a substantial delegation - thirteen in all - from the private sector and civil society. Having missed its initial opportunity in Bamako, the Ethiopian telecommunications regulator

37 Quotations and evidence from Rekha Jain, country case study of India, available from: www.apc.org/rights.apc.org/documents/wsis_research.

38 Quotations and evidence from Partha Sarker, country case study of Bangladesh, available from: www.apc.org/rights.apc.org/documents/wsis_research.

39 Quotations and evidence from Valeria Betancourt, country case study of Ecuador, available from: www.apc.org/rights.apc.org/documents/wsis_research.

(ETA) organised a national consultative workshop at the beginning of 2003, involving about fifty delegates from different stakeholder communities. A task force resulted, headed by the regulatory body with a small (though multi-stakeholder) membership and the intent to establish a regular consultation process. In practice, however, according to the country case study, this regular dialogue did not emerge, and "discussion on the WSIS process was confined to ICT experts from key organisations," reflecting similar concentration of the country's overall ICT activity. In spite of this, the development of a substantial official response to the draft WSIS texts in mid-2003 provided "an opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on WSIS issues and national development challenges." There was less consultation during the second phase of the summit, in which no formal multistakeholder consultation was arranged.

Ethiopia did not, according to the country case study, therefore see much real multistakeholder involvement. What participation did take place "was centred around government's agenda and influenced [more] by international development agencies than by strong contributions from civil society, private sector, academia and the media." Civil society and the private sector were not well organised, according to the study, and tended to respond to what government had to say rather than articulating their own concerns. To some extent, their inability to take advantage of such formal consultative spaces as were created reflects the historic weakness of civil society resulting from the hostility or wariness of successive government regimes within the country. Although Ethiopia has a wide range of civil society organisations which could have something to offer in terms of ICT policy, the case study concludes, WSIS did not generate an environment more conducive to multi-stakeholder participation. However, awareness was raised, in particular enabling government to explore experience in comparable countries more fully, and this may contribute positively to future ICT policy development.[40]

It was Kenya, among the five case study countries, that experienced a substantive and potentially lasting increase in multistakeholder participation.

A significant delegation from Kenya attended the 2002 Bamako African conference - mostly from civil society and the private sector – but quickly recognised that it was ill-prepared. A conference in Addis Ababa (co-organised by APC and UNECA in November 2002) recommended the creation of an East African Civil Society Organisations WSIS Caucus. Responding to this, a Kenya Civil Society WSIS Caucus was created, including ten organisations with longstanding experience of ICTs in development. This established local legitimacy, secured international funding (from Canadian IDRC), and became a potent lobbyist within

the country, holding national civil society consultation workshops in both phases of the WSIS process.

A further important development, after the first summit meeting, was the creation of a new alliance, the Kenya ICT Action Network (Kictanet), established by Kenyan civil society and private sector organisations with an interest in ICT policy. This highly unusual partnership, formed during a meeting in October 2004 organised jointly by APC and the local private sector and civil society partnerships, notably the Telecommunications Service Providers Association of Kenya, the Media Council of Kenya and the WSIS Caucus, built on cross-stakeholder desire to have more influential input in national ICT policy, and has been highly successful in achieving this objective. Kictanet has added a new dynamic to lobbying on national ICT policy and contributed significantly to national WSIS thinking. However, the country case study notes, it does not include mainstream development sector organisations, an important omission from the perspective of building an holistic approach to the role of ICTs in society and its development.

As noted in Chapter 6, Kenyan participation in the second phase of WSIS was substantial and substantive. Participation in the Summit, the country case study suggests, improved awareness of ICT and development issues in general and in detail, improved policy coordination within government, and built solidarity between groups that had previously contested space for policy influence. However, to reiterate comments reported in Chapter 6, limits to understanding and cohesion remained. "Careful review of the participation of public sector, civil society and private sector ... shows that the engagement was not coherent and input to the WSIS issues tended to be reactive rather than proactive." Thinking about WSIS remained focused on technology rather than the national development context, and debate in Kenya still exhibited many of the deficiencies discussed in Chapter 5. "Uncritical acceptance of the WSIS process and its recommendations in Kenya," the case study concludes, "shows that there is a long way to go to influence a global debate on a wider set of issues regarding ICTs and development" - and civil society organisations could play an important part in developing this wider discussion.[41]

The evidence from the country case studies suggests that civil society had to struggle to be heard in most cases. While many governments established some form of space in which different stakeholders could contribute, the case studies – and other experience reported by interviewees – suggest that these were usually low-key, sometimes tokenistic, and rarely central to a policymaking agenda that continued to be set by governments. Perhaps they created a precedent which could be built on in the future, but it is

40 Quotations and evidence from Lishan Adam, country case study of Ethiopia, available from: www.apc.org/rights.apc.org/documents/wsis_research.

41 Quotations and evidence from Lishan Adam, country case study of Kenya, available from: www.apc.org/rights.apc.org/documents/wsis_research.

not generally apparent that the processes they initiated are also being used for more conventional policymaking purposes. They usually seem to have been one-offs for WSIS, in other words. The exception to this pattern comes from Kenya, where the establishment of Kictanet, as an authoritative non-governmental partnership, looks as if it may have lasting impact. Democratic engagement, the role of individual sector champions and systematic lobbying are all potential features of continuing multistakeholder participation, and Kictanet's success to date, both in respect of WSIS and in influencing other ICT decisions – for example on telecommunications regulation - suggests a potential new direction for multistakeholder activity within the sector in other countries. The fact that it combines civil society and private sector participation seems to be an important factor in building its authority with government. Inclusion of a wider range of civil society organisations, notably development NGOs, may add further to its potency and its potential.

Civil society contributions

When it comes to the content of discussions during WSIS – as in any summit – interviewees identified five main objectives for civil society:

a. To "get its message across", whatever that message may be - in other words, to raise the profile of particular issues that civil society (or any individual organisation) considers important: with delegations, other civil society participants and (where possible) a wider audience

b. To articulate voices of the poor and disenfranchised

c. To maintain (i.e. resist "backsliding" on) established United Nations agreements (for example on rights or development priorities) and, where possible

d. To improve language concerning these established rights and priorities

e. To introduce new language into international discourse that will extend existing provisions – for example, by promoting women's rights or child protection, or by entrenching multistakeholder dialogue for the future.

Civil society's ability to achieve these objectives depends, like that of any other interest group, on its ability to secure wider support for them, and therefore on its ability to use the resources available to it in order to secure that support and its translation into text. This means reaching beyond the core civil society constituency within meetings, partnering and reaching agreement with representatives of other stakeholder communities. For all civil society organisations, it therefore involves tensions between their role as representatives of a particular interest group (which may be "the poor or marginalised") and their role as actors in a process designed to achieve consensus. Critics

of one view or the other might describe this as a contest between collaboration and utopianism. Caucuses try to resolve this by achieving consensus within civil society, but do not always succeed in doing so; and the latter stages of the second phase of WSIS saw some antagonisms emerge between those civil society organisations that took a more pragmatic and those that took a more ideological view.

The ability of civil society to engage constructively with other stakeholders is partly political: marriages of convenience can sometimes – actually, it would seem, quite often - be made which cut across differences of paradigm. Civil society and private sector groups, for example, share a common interest in achieving greater input into decision-making. However, other stakeholders make clear, it is the quality of civil society input into any process that will determine how much civil society organisations are listened to. How well do civil society proponents of any particular proposal understand the issues concerned, the motivations of different actors, the likely impact of wider policy? How far are proposals based on evidence rather than assumption or ideology? How amenable are organisations to reaching pragmatic consensus with other perspectives? Oppositionalism sometimes plays well within civil society, but other stakeholders say they find it very off-putting and that it makes it less likely that civil society proposals will enter into the texts that are finally agreed. In the second WSIS phase, notably over Internet governance, many government and private sector stakeholders felt that the "constructive engagement" offered by civil society helped smooth the way to final agreement, perhaps because it enabled them to discuss the politics of Internet governance in a way that was less polarised between international power blocs.

Text, however, is not – or at least should not be – the endgame here. International agreements are littered with text that is honoured in the breach rather than observance. Ambiguous texts, texts so bland as to be meaningless, texts that no-one ever expects most of their signatories to comply with: all of these are commonplace in international agreements. Many interviewees recognised the way in which the momentum of negotiations drew them into preoccupation with the text rather than its meaning: with achieving a form of words that secures agreement which approximates more with their own position than with that of their disputants. Equally, they recognised that this could easily lead them into hollow victories: into achieving text that lacked meaning or would never be observed. With hindsight, a lot of participants in WSIS were critical of the WSIS final texts for precisely these reasons, particularly lack of depth in the case of the text on development, and ambiguity in that on Internet governance (what, exactly, is "enhanced cooperation"?). The WSIS texts, as noted earlier, contain very few specific "commitments".

In many previous summits, civil society organisations have produced alternative texts to that of the formal summit itself. They did so in the first, Geneva, session of WSIS, producing a "declaration" which set out a consensus civil society view of what was needed to "[shape] information societies for human needs."[42]

Civil society did not produce a comparable statement in Tunis until a month after the end of the summit, by which time the attention of other stakeholders had moved on. While it expressed pleasure at some developments within WSIS – including increased, if precarious, participation by civil society in the summit process, and the establishment of the Internet Governance Forum - the tone of this final summit statement was (as its title, "Much more could have been achieved", suggests) mostly one of resigned disappointment:

> Overall, it is impossible not to conclude that WSIS has failed to live up to [its] expectations. The Tunis phase in particular, which was presented as the 'summit of solutions', did not provide concrete achievements to meaningfully address development problems.[43]

During the first phase, civil society interest in WSIS coalesced, as it had in previous summits, as organisations which thought they might be interested declared themselves, expressed their priorities and sought partners. Each new summit, interviewees suggested, starts with this sorting out of civil society interests. Civil society played a particularly prominent role in the first regional meeting to be held, in Africa in May 2002 and contributed substantially to its outcomes, mostly text related to ICTs and development. The first PrepCom then changed the emphasis, focusing strongly on the issue of who should be represented within the WSIS process and requiring civil society to concentrate too on defending its right to take part. Challenges to the inclusion of references to established human rights instruments also concentrated attention on that area of civil society interest. These, rather than development questions, held the main attention of WSIS and its civil society participants during the remainder of the first phase.

Civil society contributions to content in this period therefore concentrated on the defence of established rights of expression and the relationship between ICTs and the overall rights agenda, in which context they found themselves in informal alliance with industrial country governments. During the first phase, civil society input was directed much more towards the Declaration of Principles than towards the Plan of Action, from whose negotiation they were effectively excluded, and in which the major contributions came from governments. Where it was expressed, civil society input was strongly in tune with the very positive view of ICTs' role in development expressed within this text, but – as noted earlier in this chapter – any such input came from those civil society organisations which were already strongly committed to that role, and did not engage mainstream development NGOs which are more sceptical. An opportunity to address this paradigm gap was missed within civil society as well as within governments.

Civil society engagement in the second phase was rather different. Rights-based organisations continued to defend the relationship between ICTs and basic rights and to seek extensions to those rights within the text. Some niche CSOs, such as child protection and disability agencies, increased their profile in the WSIS process and achieved significant gains in terms of their own objectives. ICD-oriented CSOs had less to do, because the development components of the text agreed in Geneva were not revisited in the second phase. As we have noted repeatedly, this focused on two main issues, financing mechanisms and Internet governance. What input did civil society make into these?

During the first phase, when the Digital Solidarity Fund was proposed by the President of Senegal, civil society's instincts were to support the proposal, seeing it as a significant proposal from the South (which therefore represented a potential shift in international influence) and as a challenge to the established paradigms of development policy (which many CSOs consider, unsurprisingly, to be dominated by the North and by multilateral institutions which are also Northern-dominated). However, this amounted more to expressions of solidarity than to contributions of significance to the content of the debate. Privately, a good number of civil society representatives were sceptical of the DSF for reasons shared by (for example) liberal European donors. Civil society did not play as significant a part in the work of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms as in the WGIG, though some civil society organisations (including APC) were directly involved, arguing, inter alia, for greater mutual engagement between the financing and policy agendas. Many civil society organisations were critical of what they saw as its conservatism – in particular, its reaffirmation of the primary role of private sector investment in extending connectivity and its rejection of a development instrument (the DSF) that might be Southern-owned/led. Civil society actors did lobby for new approaches to infrastructure investment during the Africa regional preparatory meeting of the second phase and the subsequent second PrepCom, though there were divisions amongst them over the DSF and the report of the TFFM. The fact that the proponents of the DSF did not pursue the matter after the second PrepCom of the second phase, for reasons discussed in Chapter 5, meant that there was little scope for further civil society engagement with it, beyond a general sense of frustration that the "development establishment" had "won".

Internet governance was another matter. Financing mechanisms were historically largely matters for government;

42 The Geneva civil society declaration is available from: www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en?&id=1179|1208.

43 "Much more could have been achieved", p. 4, available from: www.worldsummit2003.de/download_en/WSIS-CS-summit-statement-rev1-23-12-2005-en.pdf.

many in civil society saw the Internet as part of their own world, a creation of individuals and non-governmental partnerships rather than of governments (or, come to that, the private sector). There were many intellectual and ideological cross-currents between information rights-based civil society organisations and Internet pioneers. Many information rights-based organisations saw the Internet as a crucial opportunity to extend freedom of expression (with some, though less, attention to the threat of Internet censorship).

The Internet, in other words, corresponded closely to the non-governmental or anti-governmental tendencies within civil society. CSOs might be expected to defend free-spirited, multilateral alternative models of international governance like the Internet Engineering Task Force. At the same time, however, many in civil society shared the resentment of developing countries at the apparent authority over the Internet held by the United States. This included its apparent authority over ICANN (in spite of the fact that ICANN's governance model was more open to non-governmental stakeholders than, say, the ITU or its postal equivalent, the UPU). In general, civil society opinion here wanted to see both a reduction in United States influence (which was in line with developing countries' objectives) and a reduction (or at least no increase) in government influence over the Internet (which was not), and certainly no increase in influence for the (CSO-unfriendly) ITU (which some countries saw as the natural home for Internet governance, as it had historically been for telecommunications).

This was quite a complex web. Interviewees suggested that two things were crucial to civil society's effectiveness within the Internet governance debate.

One was the structure adopted for the WGIG, which is described in Chapter 6. This was a much more CSO-friendly structure than the TFFM: one in which civil society was invited to select representatives, most of whom were approved; where those representatives were given space to contribute fully, on equal terms with representatives of other stakeholder groups; and where civil society language contributed substantially to the final report. The WGIG was therefore seen as a major advance for civil society influence in an important international negotiation. This may only have been possible because governments already lacked authority over the Internet and so were more willing to concede space on it to other stakeholders – a point discussed in Chapter 8 – but it had real value for civil society. In particular, it gave civil society advocates a much stronger position of authority from which to lobby for their language during the final PrepComs of the second phase.

The second factor cited as crucial was the Internet Governance Caucus, which brought together civil society and other Internet specialists in common cause to argue in favour of the broad objective of an Internet more free from US authority yet not subject to more governmental or inter-governmental control. This caucus had three advantages. Firstly, it contained a very high level of expertise on the issues that it dealt with, coming from members of the Internet community. Secondly, many of its Internet-focused participants were used to working with each other in other contexts. Thirdly, it benefited from the relatively similar views on the roles of governments and non-governmental actors which were shared by many in the Internet community with many within civil society organisations, especially those concerned with information rights. The result was a powerful and authoritative caucus, which was well-equipped by its knowledge and range of skills to lobby effectively within what became an intensely political debate. Civil society engagement undoubtedly helped to see off, at least within WSIS, proposals for a more authoritarian governance regime (which was also opposed by most industrial country governments and the private sector); it helped secure agreement on the Internet Governance Forum as part of the post-WSIS approach; it also contributed a significant amount of language to the final WSIS text on Internet governance, including the mandate of that Forum.

With hindsight, participants in this debate could argue quite strongly for the benefits of constructive engagement in comparison with, say, those of developing and issuing an alternative civil society statement from the summit's margins.

In the Geneva phase, civil society had a wider range of issues to discuss. The whole character of the "information society" seemed up for grabs, and there were points of principle to argue on a wide range of issues around which civil society could coalesce. The hostility of many government delegations to civil society presence also fostered a sense of community and solidarity. Civil society input focused on rights issues, and had relatively little impact on the text on development. These factors were less apparent in the Tunis phase, which focused much more narrowly on Internet governance – an issue in which civil society found other ways of influencing outcomes (in the WGIG and through dialogue with government delegates sharing many Internet community objectives). The majority of civil society organisation and caucusing were also weaker in the second phase, but the Internet Governance Caucus provided a powerful instrument which could be used, with significant success, to advance positions commonly held within civil society.

The private sector

Before considering the lessons for civil society organisations emerging from this experience, it is worth looking briefly at the comparable experience of the private sector. As noted earlier, while the UN system makes little distinction between

the private sector and civil society, this is not the case with the ITU, which has had private sector "Sector Members" closely involved in much of its work since the early 1990s. While not entirely uncontroversial within the ITU – some governments are very clear about the limits to private sector involvement when final decisions are reached – this might have been expected to give the business community an inside track on representation. The hostility which ICT businesses actually experienced during the first PrepCom of the first phase may have taken both business representatives and the ITU aback, and certainly did much to foster a "common cause of the excluded" with civil society.

Private sector participation in WSIS was dominated by the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI) which was made up of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and ten or more other international business organisations and individual firms. It was set up by its members to act as "a vehicle through which to mobilise and coordinate the involvement of the worldwide business community in the processes leading to and culminating in the Summit."[44]

Interviewees for this report from all sectors agree that the CCBI was highly effective at representing its members, though there was some criticism of lack of diversity in the content and presentation of business views when these could be formally put to PrepCom and plenary sessions. One advantage of representation through the CCBI was that, because the membership of the ICC and its other member-organisations included non-ICT as well as ICT businesses, it was able to put forward perspectives that reflected business interests across the board. However, in practice, it was ICT businesses that participated in the CCBI as in wider debate around WSIS. Some interviewees also questioned whether the CCBI was able effectively to represent the views of a wider business community, in particular whether it had sufficient understanding of the interests of small and medium sized businesses, and businesses based in developing countries, as well as those of large international concerns. Business observers feel that it became more representative, in both passive and active senses, as the WSIS process went on, though it was always disadvantaged by the different rhythms of business and summit proceedings.

In terms of participation outside the CCBI, there were clear distinctions between sections of the private sector that were and were not well represented – much as there were with civil society. Not surprisingly, it was ICT businesses that participated in lobbying and in exhibiting. Business users of ICTs, including major user groups like the financial services sector, were poorly represented other than through their membership of the CCBI and its constituent organisations, in spite of the fact that they might be expected to be considerable beneficiaries of the "information society".

44   From www.iccwbo.org/policy/ebitt/id2343/index.html.

Outside formal CCBI contributions, therefore, business input had a supplier rather than a consumer perspective. This added to the similar supply-led emphasis in WSIS overall, which resulted from the ITU's management role and the skewed nature of participation in national delegations. Even within the ICT sector, there was a marked distinction between manufacturing businesses, which were well represented, and service providers, which were less likely to be present, either in the exhibition areas or in the negotiating space.

The exception, where service providers were concerned, was the presence of former national telecoms monopolies, particularly in developing country delegations. Many of these are only partly private sector today if they are private sector at all. A consequence of this was that the business component present within developing country negotiating fora was primarily made up of the most conservative and traditional part of the ICT sector – those businesses holding fixed network telephony licences, many still holding monopolies and/or controlled by state bureaucracies. Few developing countries included significant representation from the mobile telecoms sector or from the Internet community within their delegations. Industrial countries, however, were likely to have more such representatives, who usually shared perspectives on issues like market liberalisation and Internet governance with the governments in whose delegations they participated.

One section of the business community that was relatively poorly represented, ironically, was the Internet community, especially Internet service providers (particularly from developing countries) and those parts of the Internet community which do not fit straightforwardly into either business or civil society categories - organisations such as Internet registries, for example, which operate as, in effect, non-profit businesses. These latter organisations are intensely affected by debates on Internet governance, and their under-representation was a potential weakness of the Internet governance debate within WSIS. Those that did take part suggested that their peers failed to understand the potential significance for them, in the unregulated Internet, of an inter-governmental summit. If so, they were dangerously naïve. In practice, the relative openness of the WGIG, particularly its public sessions, did allow such Internet organisations to have significant informal input, but even so the number of participants from this community was small. As is often the case, those who wish to promote multistakeholder participation need to take care to encourage the engagement of significant stakeholders with narrow interests which may not form part of broader discussions but which are fundamentally affected when these broad discussions tackle narrow questions.

CCBI and wider business input into WSIS focused on a small range of common objectives. Large businesses did not want to see greater regulation, by and large, particularly

over the Internet which they felt had delivered the goods for business because of the openness with which it has developed. In this, they have common cause with civil society and industrial country governments. They are strongly in favour of private sector-led investment and of its facilitation through the privatisation and liberalisation of ICT markets. They want light rather than intrusive regulation – regulation that will foster competition rather than imposing public policy obligations on them. They see themselves as contributing to development by their investment and pursuit of business objectives, not as instruments to be used by governments to deliver development outcomes. These views – confined to a much smaller range of WSIS issues than those expressed by civil society - were consistently articulated through the CCBI.

The relationship between civil society and the private sector within WSIS was an interesting one. The early part of the first phase saw sustained attacks on the participation of both civil society and the private sector from a number of governments, which led to the exclusion of both from meetings at which they felt they had a right to be present. This common exclusion, interviewees from both camps observed, built bonds of solidarity between civil society and private sector groups, supported by a number of positive personal relationships across the stakeholder divide. Although there was always going to be a distance between civil society and the private sector – both in the range of issues they were interested in addressing and the perspective from which these might be addressed – a significant degree of partnership continued throughout the summit. Internet governance was another area in which civil society and the private sector had some common cause against the risk, as they saw it, of greater government control. The implications of this for the relationship between civil society and the private sector are discussed further in the final section of this chapter.

WSIS and multistakeholderism

The costs and benefits of participation in WSIS are still debated within civil society.

- Some participants from civil society feel that significant gains were made: some in terms of holding the line on information rights or inching towards a more open future for Internet governance; some in terms of raising issues and advocacy of ICT rights and ICTs in development; some in terms of building their own capacity and understanding of ICT issues (and of summit-style negotiations); some in terms of networking, in particular the building of bonds between civil society organisations that will be useful in the future.

- Others are more critical of the high costs involved in participation, in terms of both money and human resources - the actual cost of being part of summit

processes, and the opportunity cost in other work which could not be undertaken as a result.

It is probably easiest just to say that the experience varied. Some organisations invested relatively little and gained a good deal; others feel the opposite was true. On balance, few think that the summit as a whole was the best way of spending that amount of money, either in principle or in the specific context of the "information society". A lot of money, many feel, was spent on pretty limited outcomes. On the other hand, once a summit is declared, it is very difficult for many CSOs to opt out. Those that prioritise the issues under discussion see it either as an opportunity to press their cause or as a process from which they cannot afford to be absent (though those whose interest is more marginal might so choose). While almost every government will attend, therefore, civil society participation tends to be more skewed in favour of the already committed, and so less representative of civil society as a whole. (The relative absence of mainstream development NGOs has already been noted as a problem here.) Business organisations tend to take a more hard-headed view, based on the potential contribution of participation to the bottom line.

The desirability of multistakeholder participation in decision-making is one of the more important structural issues within current thinking about international discourse. Anxiety about the representativeness of governments and about their ability to cover all facets of any question has led to significantly more widespread support for the view that other major stakeholders – essentially the business community and civil society – need to participate in national decision-making and that their participation will significantly enhance its quality. In practice, governments share authority with other social actors within national decision-making spaces: with very rare exceptions, they do not claim the monopoly on representation or authority that many governments claim at an international level. Some governments and inter-governmental organisations, however, also see value in incorporating the business community and civil society alongside governments and inter-governmental organisations in international decision-making spaces, although their ability to advance this is constrained by the hostility of governments which do not concede multistakeholder space at home or do not see this as transferable into the international sphere.
Other governments remain adamantly opposed to this dilution of the exclusiveness of their authority.

WSIS has been cited, however, as a significant point within the longstanding debate about multistakeholderism within international decision-making. Certainly, the WSIS outcome documents strongly endorsed the principle of multistakeholderism. The Geneva Declaration of Principles included what became known as the Geneva Principle on this:

We recognize that building an inclusive Information Society requires new forms of solidarity, partnership and cooperation among governments and other stakeholders, i.e. the private sector, civil society and international organizations. Realising that the ambitious goal of this Declaration - bridging the digital divide and ensuring harmonious, fair and equitable development for all - will require strong commitment by all stakeholders, we call for digital solidarity, both at national and international levels.[45]

The Tunis Agenda reiterated this principle, and incorporated it in its proposals for following-up both Internet governance and general post-WSIS activities:

We are convinced that there is a need to initiate, and reinforce, as appropriate, a transparent, democratic, and multilateral process [concerning Internet governance], with the participation of governments, private sector, civil society and international organizations, in their respective roles.[46] ...

We encourage the development of multi-stakeholder processes at the national, regional and international levels to discuss and collaborate on the expansion and diffusion of the Internet as a means to support development efforts to achieve internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals.[47] ...

Building an inclusive development-oriented Information Society will require unremitting multi-stakeholder effort. ... Taking into account the multifaceted nature of building the Information Society, effective cooperation among governments, private sector, civil society and the United Nations and other international organizations, according to their different roles and responsibilities and leveraging on their expertise, is essential.[48]

These statements went further than might have been expected from other summits, though rhetoric did not necessarily imply implementation. Some civil society observers were initially critical of the extent of multistakeholder participation governments accepted in the Multistakeholder Advisory Group set up to establish the Internet Governance Forum – though the IGF itself, when it met in Athens in late 2006, paid exemplary attention to multistakeholder principles.

The rhetoric of the WSIS outcome documents does, however, reflect what interviewees from all sectors recognised as significantly greater multistakeholder participation in WSIS than in previous summits. The civil society bureau for WSIS had significant responsibility for facilitating civil

society participation in PrepCom and summit sessions, perhaps more than it would otherwise have had because the ITU lacked experience in handling civil society and its ways, while civil society's own structures determined how and by whom the space available should be used. Civil society and private sector speakers had more space in which to make formal contributions in PrepComs and plenary sessions. More national delegations were more interested in liaising with other stakeholders over the issues, and non-governmental stakeholders themselves may have been more willing to lobby and to reach consensus – perhaps because this looked more possible – than to argue and to state their opposition. At any rate, no-one thought that WSIS set back the cause of multistakeholder participation.

The locus of greatest multistakeholder involvement suggests one of the reasons why this might be so. Much has been made of the multistakeholder character of the WGIG, in particular the opportunity given to civil society to nominate its own representatives and the openness created within the WGIG's internal debates by focusing these on individual rather than representative participation. Everyone interviewed about their part in the WGIG felt that stakeholder differences became less important as the Group worked more intensively together and were not as significant to the final outcome as would have been the case if the WGIG had been conducted more traditionally. The question is not so much what was the effect of this modus operandi, but why it happened and whether it sets a precedent for future summits or negotiations.

A couple of observations made by some of those involved are important here.

- One is that governments may have been more willing to cede ground to other stakeholders in the case of Internet governance because they had less to lose; in fact, they did not actually hold the ground concerned in the first place, and they may have actually needed the participation of other stakeholders in order to refashion an area of governance that was outside their control. They would not, therefore, by implication, have considered allowing so much multistakeholder participation in an area of policy that was more traditionally under the control of governments and inter-governmental organisations, such as infrastructure finance.

- The other is that the WGIG methodology is particularly well attuned to a particular set of problems. As an issue, Internet governance is both highly technical and highly politicised. Many of those involved in the Internet governance debate combined entrenched views on what should happen with real ignorance of the technical structures whose governance they discussed. The informal modus operandi adopted by chairman Desai and secretary Kummer in these circumstances allowed people with strongly divergent views to learn from one

45 Geneva Declaration of Principles, section A, article 17.

46 Tunis Agenda, article 61.

47 ibid., article 80.

48 ibid., article 83.

another in a way that more formal proceedings (or consultants' reports) would not have done, and so facilitated coming together in both knowledge and understanding of different perspectives. The implication here is that other international issues which share this combination of technical complexity and politicisation may be susceptible to similar ways of working – climate change and genetically-modified foods spring to mind – but that these ways of working would have less impact on issues where technicalities are simpler and/or ideological divisions are less profound.

Some of the particularities of Internet governance here might apply more widely to information and communication issues in general. WSIS may, in other words, offer more of a precedent in how future ICT decisions are made without setting any precedent for other areas of international discourse.

Within the ICT sector, much is likely to depend on how the multistakeholder principles in the WSIS outcome documents are translated into practice by, for example, the Internet Governance Forum and the action-line follow-up processes established by the Tunis Agenda. The Global Alliance, which follows on the work of the UN ICT Task Force, has also inherited similar multistakeholder principles. However, this does not necessarily have much impact on other international ICT decision-making fora.

The evidence reported in Chapters 5 and 6 suggests that, with the obvious exception of Internet governance bodies, the content of the WSIS outcome documents has not had much impact on the issues being discussed within these pre-existing decision-making agencies: that WSIS is, in practice, a one-off event; and that it had too little to say with too little depth about the issues with which they are concerned. There is little evidence to date, either, of any of the multistakeholder principles adumbrated in the WSIS documents affecting the working methods of mainstream ICT agencies. For the present, the "Louder Voices" conclusions seem again to be maintained.

One inter-governmental agency that did find itself exploring its own representative structures as a result of WSIS, however, was the ITU. Although, when charged with running WSIS, it had considerable experience of private sector involvement in decision-making, it had little understanding of civil society. The ITU discussed a number of possible reforms to its structure at its quadrennial Plenipotentiary Conference, held towards the end of 2006 in Antalya, Turkey, including the possibility of greater civil society involvement. Somewhat cautiously, the Antalya "Plenipot" resolved to initiate a "study on the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the activities of the Union related to the World Summit on the Information Society." This may or may not lead to greater space for meaningful civil society participation; time will tell.[49]

At a national level, the evidence of most of the country case studies undertaken for this report does not show any substantial changes taking place within the WSIS period itself. However, one of those case studies – that of Kenya – does show significantly greater engagement by civil society organisations in policymaking; and it is clear (e.g. from their WSIS delegations) that similar broadening did take place in at least a few other countries. Many civil society participants do in fact feel that WSIS may have a substantial impact on their ability to engage in national policymaking debates, resulting from a combination of factors – notably the experience they have had of engaging during the WSIS process itself (in those countries where some multistakeholder participation did occur); the possibility that national government officials will respond more positively in future, given the emphasis on multistakeholderism in the WSIS outcome documents; greater knowledge of the range of ICT issues which they have gained through WSIS; and better networking with other civil society organisations and the Internet community within their countries (as in Kenya). These observations relate to the ICT sector rather than to civil society interaction with government more generally.

As for international civil society networking, it is still early to say how extensively that may be affected by WSIS in the long term. The first phase of WSIS undoubtedly saw the building of many new partnerships and of considerable esprit de corps among civil society participants. With the exception of those working on Internet governance, this tended to dissipate somewhat during the second phase. Since WSIS ended, interviewees report, it has been hard to maintain networks that were set up during WSIS, again with the exception of relationships around Internet governance where there is still a good deal of momentum to events. The implications of all of the findings in this chapter for future civil society engagement with the issues are discussed in Chapter 8. ■

49 The "Plenipot" resolution is at www.itu.int/council/groups/pp06-plen7.html. A review of the ITU's activity post-WSIS can be found in the chapter by D. MacLean in *Global Information Society Watch*, first report, APC, forthcoming.

Action Line	Possible moderators / facilitaros
RESPONSIBILITY FOR WSIS ACTION LINES, AS ALLOCATED BY THE TUNIS AGENDA	
C1. The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development	ECOSOC/UN Regional Commissions/ITU
C2. Information and communication infrastructure	ITU
C3. Access to information and knowledge	ITU/UNESCO
C4. Capacity building	UNDP/UNESCO/ITU/UNCTAD
C5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs	ITU
C6. Enabling environment	ITU/UNDP/UN REGIONAL COMMISSIONS/UNCTAD
C7. ICT Applications	
¬ E-government	¬ UNDP/ITU
¬ E-business	¬ WTO/UNCTAD/ITU/UPU
¬ E-learning	¬ UNESCO/ITU/UNIDO
¬ E-health	¬ WHO/ITU
¬ E-employment	¬ ILO/ITU
¬ E-environment	¬ WHO/WMO/UNEP/ UN-Habitat/ITU/ICAO
¬ E-agriculture	¬ FAO/ITU
¬ E-science	¬ UNESCO/ITU/UNCTAD
C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content	UNESCO
C9. Media	UNESCO
C10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society	UNESCO/ECOSOC
C11. International and regional cooperation	UN regional commissions/UNDP/ITU/UNESCO/ECOSOC

Recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations

This final chapter is divided as follows:

- It begins with a summary of the findings set out in the earlier chapters and a brief set of conclusions about the overall impact of WSIS on developing countries and civil society.

- It then raises a number of issues and challenges facing different stakeholders, particularly in developing countries and in civil society.

- Finally, it makes a series of recommendations about actions which might be taken to enhance participation by these stakeholders. These recommendations are comparable in purpose to those in the 2002 "Louder Voices" report.

While the content of this entire report is the responsibility of its author, this is even more true of these conclusions and recommendations, which are intended as much for discussion within APC as beyond it.

Conclusions

From 2001 to the end of 2005, WSIS dominated international discussion of some important ICT issues. While it did not cover the full range of questions that might be considered part of the "information society", by any means, it did bring a large number of people together to discuss some important aspects of this, particularly – its secretariat would suggest – the role of ICTs in development. What did it achieve?

It was suggested in Chapter 4 that summits are almost always described as "successes" or "great successes". To be considered "failures", they have to fail most abjectly: people are reluctant to accept that they have invested so much time and money to achieve little or nothing. WSIS is not widely regarded as a failure, nor as a "great success". Opinion varies about just how much was achieved, but the nearest approximation to an average of opinion among interviewees for this project would be, perhaps, that it was "modestly successful". How and where might this be so?

It is important, first, to recognise how narrowly WSIS avoided failure. The first summit preparatory process was minutes away from collapse over the issue of the Digital Solidarity Fund at the end of its final reconvened PrepCom. For much of the final stages of negotiations during the second phase, many participants did not expect sufficient compromise to be achieved on Internet governance. Either of these circumstances could have gone the other way, and, if they had, WSIS would have been considered

a failure indeed. Of course, brinkmanship like this is not unusual in challenging international fora, and many factors affect each forum's ability to progress beyond differences to some form of consensus. Much of the responsibility for the compromise reached on each occasion within WSIS seems to have been due to the high degree of pressure to avoid failure; some to the skill of individuals (including meeting chairs) in securing compromise.

So, to some degree, the "success" of WSIS could be said primarily to lie in avoiding failure. Significant, if not overwhelming, change could be said to have occurred in the two major areas of dispute whose resolution preoccupied the second phase – infrastructure finance and Internet governance.

In the case of infrastructure finance, although this was probably underestimated at the time, the report of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms and the pressure which developing countries applied over the Digital Solidarity Fund led to movement in the focus of debate on ICT infrastructure finance. For the first time in a decade, the development establishment began to review the relationship between public and private finance in this sector, including the potential role of IFI and donor funds. This is beginning to mesh with reconsideration of the legal and regulatory frameworks required for ICT infrastructure development in a new phase of ICT restructuring (built around the deployment of new wireless and broadband networks rather than the privatisation and liberalisation of fixed line telecoms). In years to come, WSIS and the TFFM may be seen as playing a pivotal role here; perhaps as being a tipping point. "Modest success" may, in due course, develop into something more. On the other hand, it may not.

In the case of Internet governance, different observers have different views. Some think that WSIS took a significant step in shifting the balance of power within the Internet, though with little immediate effect. Others think that nothing changed. Most people on both sides (all sides) of the argument left Tunis fairly happy with the outcome – which implied that the argument would continue in the new fora that the summit established: the Internet Governance Forum and whatever mechanisms define "enhanced cooperation". Experience in the year following WSIS was mixed. The meaning of "enhanced cooperation" remained unclear, while the first meeting of the Internet Governance Forum largely eschewed this controversy in favour of developing broader understanding of Internet issues and differences of opinion on them (in which it was notably successful). WSIS therefore did not transform Internet governance, but it has created more space for debate. How that space will be used is yet open to question.

One way of looking at this is to see WSIS not as a revolutionary moment in Internet development but as a step in the long-term evolution of the Internet. The Internet was, after all, originally, designed in and for the United States

military. Governance and authority over its development have expanded outwards from that narrow origin to include - successively - academics, geeks and commercial businesses. The "Internet community" resulting from this has developed organically rather than by the fiat of any government authority, national or international. Decisions about the development of Internet standards are made collectively by groups, often made up of individuals rather than representatives, on a basis of mutual tolerance and intolerance: attention is paid to the competent while the incompetent speak to themselves alone. Where more formal governance is required, as with domain names, compromises were reached between this essentially non-governmental structure and the statutory authority required for enforcement.

All evolving governance processes build on legacies; they retain vestiges of what was present in the past. Like constitutional monarchy in Western Europe, these vestiges can simultaneously be symbolic *and* retain significant roles or influence. They can be displaced either by revolution or evolution. The last twenty-five years of Internet development can be seen as the gradual evolution of the Internet from an instrument of US polity to a global resource - and the same can be said of Internet governance. Authority has gradually moved away from the United States as the Internet has developed, and can be expected to continue moving further away as the Internet becomes more truly global in character (in infrastructure, content and user base). Nevertheless, features of Internet governance resulting from its legacy remain, and ICANN's status, and that of the root server system, vis-à-vis the US government are among these. At present, they are both symbolic and (potentially) significant. Over time, evolution of the Internet, particularly its globalisation, are likely to make them more wholly symbolic and less truly significant; however, at present they are certainly considered both in many countries, particularly developing countries - and therefore a threat to national sovereignty.

It seems important, looking at this from the perspective of those countries, not to confuse two separate issues which are often confused in this debate: the authority of the United States vis-à-vis other countries in respect of Internet governance (an issue of sovereignty and international relations); and the authority of governments over the Internet (an issue of national governance, particularly the balance of power between the citizen and the state). Many governments in WSIS pursued both an increase in governmental authority and a decrease or removal of the perceived legacy powers of the United States. Industrial countries and the private sector were much less concerned about the US' legacy powers, but more concerned to avoid increased regulation of the Internet, national or international. Civil society organisations tended to favour diminution of US legacy powers and avoidance of increased regulation (though, in their case, on grounds of citizens' rather than business rights).

There were, therefore, a lot of different objectives cutting across these two central (national and international) dimensions of Internet governance.

The argument during WSIS over Internet governance - and particularly over ICANN and root servers - can be seen as an attempt to remove the remaining US powers over the Internet, and so globalise Internet regulation at a stroke. This would have been a revolutionary moment in the development of Internet - the equivalent, say, of the comet landfall that ended the Cretaceous era or the end of the ancien régime in France in 1789. The difficulty with it for industrial countries and the private sector was not that it would have diminished US authority (though that was an issue in the United States) but that it would have increased regulatory intervention in the Internet, since it implied relocating authority over aspects of the Internet from places where they were merely potentially subject to government intervention (by the US) to places where they would be actively subject to regulation by either new or existing bodies (such as the ITU). Industrial countries and the private sector were particularly averse to the possibility of ITU-style regulation and standard-setting being imposed on the Internet, where they thought it would constrain rather than facilitate the dynamic innovation that has made it so successful.

The "enhanced cooperation" approach advocated by the European Union and adopted in the Tunis final documents can be seen in this context as an endorsement of evolutionary change. This perhaps explains why so many parties to this dispute could consider themselves to be victorious (or at least not to be defeated). It allowed Internet governance conservatives in the United States to retain a sense of US leadership; radicals in developing countries to retain the prospect of building a new, more inter-governmental (and more interventionist) model of Internet governance; and proponents of gradual change to envisage a continuation of the laissez-faire "governance-lite" approach which they prefer. The likelihood is that "enhanced cooperation", if it means anything, will mean the continued gradual diminution of the United States' effective superior power over the Internet which has been taking place for the past twenty-five years, without its being replaced by an inter-governmental agency along the lines of the UN model; but this will continue to be a process of gradual evolution.

This suggests, then, that WSIS may seem, with hindsight, to have a lasting legacy in both infrastructure finance and Internet governance. Would the developments concerned have happened anyway without WSIS intervening? Opinion on this, too, is divided, but the consensus is probably that the status quo in both cases was becoming unsustainable anyway and that it would therefore need to be addressed; i.e. that the existing mechanisms for infrastructure finance would be stretched too far by the potential of new networks and that the pressures for change in Internet governance arrangements were building up to a point where they could ultimately erupt. In both cases, this suggests, WSIS may have brought forward changes that were likely to come about, one way or another, within the medium term. It may not, however, have been the most cost-effective way of doing so, or more likely to achieve outcomes as good as those that might be achievable through other fora.

As for development, the content of the WSIS outcome documents – as discussed in Chapter 5 – is thin. Far more articulate, incisive, memorable and useful statements of the potential (and limitations) of ICTs in development were produced during the WSIS period by individual multilateral organisations (the World Bank, the UNDP, UNESCO, GKP etc.), donor governments (DFID, SDC, etc.) and developing country governments (a succession of ICT strategies which, though sometimes criticised for being over-ambitious, generally had a much more analytical and cohesive feel than the Geneva Plan of Action). ICD specialists interviewed for this project were generally disparaging of the content of the WSIS outcome documents, thought these already looked substantially outdated, and did not think them useful in persuading mainstream development sector colleagues of the merits of ICTs. In the twenty years before WSIS, the Maitland Commission's 1984/5 report "The Missing Link" was increasingly often cited in discussion about the evolution of thinking on ICD, though it would seem more rarely read by those that cited it.[1] The WSIS outcome documents may come to share this fate.

WSIS does not seem to have changed much, therefore, in the content of the ICD debate, though this has clearly moved on in other areas. The World Bank and others are rethinking some of the policy and regulatory issues associated with enabling frameworks. The UNDP and others are focusing on building more effective approaches to mainstreaming, built around better understanding between ICT and mainstream professionals. Donor countries are reviewing – and in some cases reducing – their commitment to ICD. Developing countries are beginning to integrate ICTs more substantively into Poverty Reduction Strategies and similar documents. However, these have not been WSIS-driven processes so much as processes driven by the same enthusiasm for ICD which led to WSIS in the first place. They would, most development specialists seem to think, have happened anyway; and some think that WSIS may have slowed down their development by focusing debate on a rather limited range of perceptions that were pulled together during its first year.

Where WSIS does seem to have had an effect on the ICD debate, according to interviewees, is in awareness and in networking. Developing country interviewees, in particular,

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1 It was virtually impossible, before WSIS, to find a copy online, and there were few print copies available.

felt that WSIS had increased substantially the information and knowledge available to them, to their colleagues and fellow participants, and thereby to decision-makers in general within their countries. They felt this better understanding would improve the quality of decision-making and that the wider range of engagement in ICTs resulting from WSIS, which varied in scale from country to country, would also help to make decision-making more inclusive. This view is supported by evidence from some, but not all, of the country case studies undertaken for this report. In terms of networking, participants undoubtedly gained considerably from greater access to a wider range of experience and expertise, and this helped to build a broader base for networking support in future. Civil society, in particular, gained from this aspect of the summit. However, networks require maintenance if weak as well as strong relationships are to survive the end of summits. WSIS does not have self-sustaining networks extending beyond its own life, with the exception (in a sense) of the Internet Governance Forum, and the value of this networking will tend to dissipate unless other networks can build upon it. There are candidates for this role; whether they succeed in taking up the opportunity is to be seen.

The above paragraphs suggest that WSIS had a limited but significant impact in certain policy areas. What it did not do was substantially address many other areas of what could be considered the "information society". It tended to assume that there were powerful links between ICT investment and economic growth, but did not explore this relationship, where it was most likely or how it might be fostered, in the sense that these issues have been considered by the OECD. It described a range of positive potential social impacts of ICTs but had little to say about the risks, in particular where relations between the state and citizen are concerned. Discussion about rights was largely based around the defence of established freedoms of expression, rather than changes and potential conflicts which may arise as a result of widespread use of new technologies. WSIS was, in other words, seen by most of its participants as an opportunity to advocate the use of ICTs rather than to explore their implications for the future; to propose an information society than to try and understand one.

Which, in a sense, takes the discussion back to the origins of WSIS itself. As pointed out in Chapters 3 and 4, the original resolution of the ITU "Plenipot" was not necessarily thought to mean a summit of the kind that eventually transpired. At the time, many thought it meant a smaller scale event involving heads of state and experts, drawing up a report for consultation. Summits, historically, have been large scale events which address big problems for which broad and universal agreements are required on the best ways to move forward. They are not good at developing understanding in depth, particularly of complex issues which pose new challenges. Smaller fora are better at that, something which the WGIG demonstrated. It is interesting to speculate, in hindsight, whether a more sophisticated and more lasting outcome might have been achieved by a combination of the summit with an international commission that investigated the issues with depth and rigour.

To summarise the views of interviewees on WSIS as a whole (insofar as this is possible). It had limited achievements, but was not a failure. It advanced some debates, but did not address others. It cost a great deal of money, and the costs of future summits to their participants should be more carefully considered before they are agreed. (In particular, a two-stage summit was unnecessary. The difficult issues of infrastructure finance and Internet governance might have been resolved during the first summit if the second had not opened up the opportunity for delay. The second summit added nothing to the first except a resolution of these issues.) On balance, there were gains, but they could almost certainly have been achieved at lesser cost.

Challenges and recommendations: developing countries

Developing country participation in WSIS is discussed in Chapter 6. This analysis suggests that developing countries played a more prominent part in WSIS than industrial countries, though primarily because the latter lacked incentives to prioritise the summit. Developing country participation, however, was led by what might be described as the telecommunications establishment – ministries of communications, telecommunications regulators and fixed network operators – in cooperation with the diplomats normally involved in inter-governmental drafting. Little part was played in most developing country participation by new ICT sectors (mobile businesses and the Internet community), broadcasters, mainstream development ministries or civil society. A distinction was also apparent between a small number of larger and economically more powerful developing countries, possessed of substantial ICT expertise and able to exert significant influence either alone or in partnership with one another; and smaller, weaker developing countries, particularly LDCs, who found it more difficult to press their agenda. Aside from the overall development text, which was largely bland and insubstantial, developing countries pressed for two objectives, neither of which was fully achieved though each had partial outcomes in the direction sought: the Digital Solidarity Fund, which generated some new approaches to infrastructure finance; and the removal of US authority over ICANN and the root-server system, which led to some movement in the evolution of Internet governance.

Developing country delegates did agree, however, that they and their countries gained substantially in networking, information and awareness from the WSIS experience, and that this would have lasting implications for national decision-making.

The "Louder Voices" report listed a number of reasons why developing countries lacked influence in international ICT decision-making. These included, in particular, those set out in the box below.

As a summit, WSIS was of course very different from the normal run of international decision-making fora; it dealt in generalities, not specifics; was of less critical interest to industrial countries; tended to politicise issues rather than to focus on technical solutions. It seems therefore, this report suggests, to have had relatively little impact on permanent ICT decision-making fora – though increased awareness of the issues may encourage greater developing country participation in those fora in the future.

At the international level:

a. Lack of easy, affordable and timely access to information about ICT-related issues, decision-making fora and processes.

b. Logistical problems, including the frequency and location of international meetings and restrictions on participation (for example, by private sector and civil society experts).

c. Ineffective use of financial resources available to support participation.

At the national level:

a. Lack of policy awareness, at all levels of government and citizenship, of the potential role of ICTs in development.

b. Lack of technical and policy capacity on ICT issues, particularly in respect of emerging technologies and new policy areas - such as migration from circuit-switched to IP networks and indeed Internet issues in general.

c. Weaknesses in national and regional policy-making processes, including:

　　i. Lack of political leadership

　　ii. Absence of national ICT strategies

　　iii. Ineffective coordination between different government departments and agencies with ICT responsibilities

　　iv. Lack of private sector and civil society participation in national decision-making

　　v. Inadequate preparation for international meetings

　　vi. Ineffective use of financial and human resources.

Developing countries had less challenge participating in WSIS than they do in the wider range of ICT negotiations. Summits are, self-evidently, important. Presidents and heads of government expect their countries to be represented. UN agencies invite broad participation. All countries have missions in New York to facilitate their representation in other UN summits; most countries (though not all) had missions in Geneva which could facilitate theirs in WSIS. Although expensive, developing countries almost universally, therefore, attended WSIS and played some part in it: speaking in plenary sessions, participating in caucuses, etc. Very few countries did not attend the plenary summit events (174 out of the UN's 192 member-states had official delegations in Geneva, 168 in Tunis). Participation in PrepComs was a little sparser (143 national delegations attended the first PrepCom of the first phase, for example; 149 the second PrepCom of the second phase), and delegations were considerably smaller, but nevertheless a considerable majority of governments took part. Although it was expensive, the money for participation was found; the logistics challenges were overcome.

If the international factors described in the box above were not so prominent in WSIS, many of the national factors concerned were apparent. What impact did the WSIS experience have on these?

Firstly, WSIS did, by all accounts, increase awareness of the potential of ICTs in development amongst government officials and, to a lesser extent, other parts of the community. Government officials were directly involved in WSIS, and required to demonstrate that governments were taking WSIS issues seriously; and demonstrate this they therefore sought to do. Almost all developing country interviewees for this report felt that greater awareness had been achieved and would have an impact in the future. However, this did not reach far down the decision-making ladder. Media attention to WSIS, in most countries, was minimal. The absence of multistakeholder engagement in WSIS policymaking, in many countries, meant that the breadth of awareness and information transfer was less than it might have been. In a fast-moving sector such as ICTs, too, knowledge rapidly falls out of date.

Secondly, while WSIS was not primarily concerned with technical detail, it did provide spaces in which greater policy and technical expertise could be acquired by developing country representatives. This was partly a result of WSIS discussions – it would be difficult to engage seriously in the Internet governance debate without acquiring some greater understanding of Internet governance issues – and partly of the opportunity to network with regional experts from other countries. However, the overall policy focus and the politicisation of WSIS debate probably meant that less capacity was built than might have been.

Developing countries were stronger and better represented in WSIS than they were in the other ICT decision-making fora assessed in "Louder Voices". Nevertheless, interviews and country case studies for this report suggest, many of the same weaknesses were to be found in national and regional policymaking processes.

- While political leadership in some countries was strong – Senegal is a good example – in many countries WSIS was left in the hands of the telecommunications establishment rather than those of central government. While ministers may have been involved, these were not usually powerful ministers; and the attention paid to WSIS by the most important centres of government, such as ministries of finance, was weak.

- National ICT strategies have been developed in many countries in the years since the "Louder Voices" report was published. However, as noted in Chapter 5, they are often poorly integrated into Poverty Reduction Strategies and other national development plans. The predominance of the telecommunications establishment in participation at WSIS meant that relatively little of the development debate there fed back into mainstream development activity in-country; and, in many countries, mainstream development concerns were poorly articulated in policy debate concerning WSIS.

- Both interviews and country case studies suggest that ineffective coordination between government departments continued during WSIS. As well as having little or no mainstream development participation in WSIS meetings, many countries appear to have undertaken little in the way of policy coordination on WSIS issues at a national level. With some notable exceptions, country presentations at WSIS offered the perspective from the communications ministry rather than an holistic view of ICTs and development across the board.

- Some developing countries – including Kenya, among the country case studies for this report – opened up new spaces for participation by the private sector and civil society in national decision-making. However, this experience does not appear to have been very widely shared, in spite of significant efforts to secure participation by civil society in quite a number of countries.

The challenges for developing countries in future international ICT decision-making are therefore likely to remain much as they were at the time of the "Louder Voices" report:

- Lack of awareness of the potential (and limitations) of ICTs in much of the political establishment and in society more generally

- Lack of technical and policy capacity, particularly in areas of emerging technology, and lack of capacity to assess the likely impact and cost-effectiveness of ICT reforms and ICD interventions

- Lack of integration between national ICT strategies and national development plans such as Poverty Reduction Strategies

- Poor knowledge management, in particular inadequate coordination between government departments responsible for the ICT sector and for mainstream development objectives

- Lack of private sector and civil society (multistakeholder) input into decision-making – a result both of their absence from official decision-making processes and of their own limited capacity

- Inadequate preparation for international meetings, including the lack of coordination with regional partners

- Ineffective use of financial and human resources.

Effective participation in international decision-making fora is a highly complex matter, illustrated by the following graphic derived from the "Louder Voices" report:[2]

The illustration might be summarised as follows. Effective delegations benefit from powerful and coherent national and regional policy formulation processes which identify priority issues, coordinate and synthesise the views of different stakeholders and establish a position which can be sustained through lobbying and negotiation over the weeks and months preceding a decision as well as at the decision-making meeting itself. These policy formulation processes are in turn underpinned by deep policy structures – the analytical capabilities that allow policymakers to understand the implications of different options and choose the most effective strategies for their countries. Without this comprehensive range of tools, participation in international fora will be weak.

It will always be difficult for developing countries to secure this degree of complexity and comprehensiveness in policymaking, not least because expert human resources are in short supply, but this does not mean that much cannot be done to improve the quality of representation. One key issue is prioritisation. Major industrial countries need this level of policymaking across the board because they have deep interests in many different areas of ICT policy. Developing countries, by and large, have fewer interests. They can afford to prioritise – to identify the limited range of issues on which decisions are sufficiently significant for

Decision-making processes

Agenda Setting → Proposals → Decisions

Policy formulation and implementation

Issue identification   Formulation of options   Coordination   Implementation

Deep policy structures

Policy assessment   Policy research & analysis   Evaluation
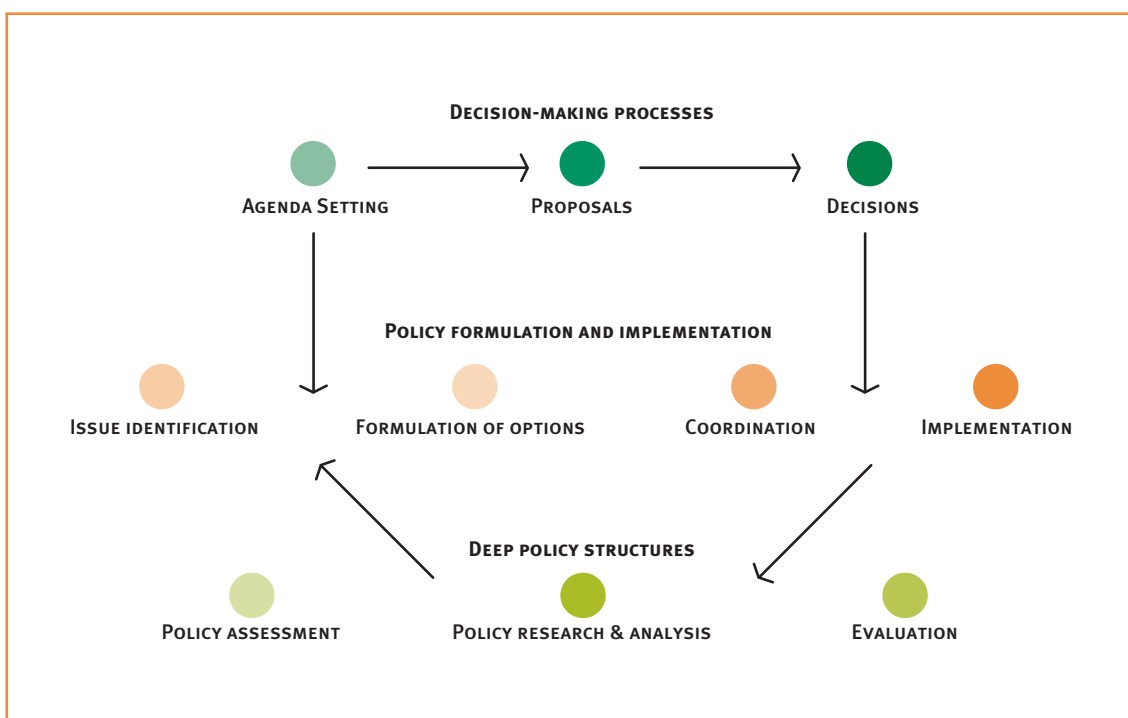
them to invest substantial resources, and to focus explicitly on those issues: developing the policy capacity required to have an impact, involving the full range of stakeholders in national policymaking. They can also seek to secure the support of regional peers and wider developing country groupings which can have more impact if they act collectively in informal as well as formal decision-making gatherings, and provide fuller support to the delegate or delegates attending all of the fora involved.

Interviewees for the "Louder Voices" study believed that it was more valuable for a developing country to have real influence in two or three areas of real significance to it than to have an ineffective presence in a larger number of decision-making processes – particularly if the lead role on different issues of importance could be shared between countries within a region, with each developing appropriate expertise on behalf of the regional group as a whole. They were also clear, however, that far too little prioritisation along these lines took place, and that available expertise was currently spread too thinly and too indiscriminately to have the impact that their governments desired. WSIS may have helped developing country delegations to improve their understanding of issues and their networks, but this analysis was not disputed by interviewees for this study.

The cost of participation remains, of course, a major factor inhibiting developing country participation in international fora. It was among the factors identified by interviewees for the "Louder Voices" report, although a number made clear their feeling that resources could and would be found to support participation, at least within governments, if the

issues involved were considered sufficiently important. Many also expressed concern about the poor utilisation of funds made available to support participation by intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) concerned about developing countries' under-representation. Some fellowships – i.e. funding for travel and participation costs – were available to some developing countries to facilitate participation in WSIS (as they are, for example, within the ITU). However, the attendance lists for WSIS show that some developing country governments sent very large delegations irrespective of cost.[3] Civil society participation from developing countries was more substantially inhibited by cost than government delegations.

Overall, then, it is suggested that the "Louder Voices" recommendations concerning developing country participation in permanent ICT decision-making fora stand today much as they did in 2002. These include recommendations to both international fora themselves and developing countries participating in them. In particular (quotations from the earlier report in italics; amended text and additions unitalicised):

1. International ICT fora should

    ¬   promote awareness of the potential and limitations which ICTs have *by providing comprehensive, publicly-accessible, non-technical information on the relevance of their activities to the development agenda*;

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3   See Annex 1.

- ¬ *provide independent, authoritative technical/ policy research and analysis of major issues to be decided;*

- ¬ *hold meetings in developing regions in a way that minimises travel costs for developing country participants;*

- ¬ avoid simultaneous scheduling of important events;

- ¬ *ensure that their procedures allow all sources of developing country policy and technical capacity to participate in decision-making, whether they come from government, the private sector or not-for-profit organisations.*

- • Developing country governments:

  - ¬ should take action to:

    - ┈➤ *improve information flows and policy co-ordination between different government departments and agencies with ICT responsibilities* and those with mainstream development roles;

    - ┈➤ *promote informed public discussion and debate through both general and specialised media;*

    - ┈➤ *include all relevant stakeholders in policy-making on an issue-by-issue basis and through permanent consultation fora;*

    - ┈➤ *encourage participation of experts from the private sector and civil society in national delegations to international decision-making fora;*

  - ¬ and should *review their current practices with respect to meeting preparation, delegate selection, participation, accountability and follow-up with a view to ensuring that these practices result in the most effective use of financial resources through the optimum deployment and development of technical and policy capacity.*

Capacity-building is, of course, crucial to success in this area, and a specific recommendation concerning capacity-building, related to both developing countries and civil society, is included towards the end of this chapter.

Challenges and recommendations: civil society

Civil society participation in WSIS is discussed in Chapter 7. It was, in many ways, substantially more effective than in comparable previous summits because more space was made available for it within the summit's formal structure.

Being more engaged in the formal processes, civil society organisations were able to make more gains, notably in the inclusion of some text in the final outcome documents. There was less oppositionalism from civil society than seen at many summits, and civil society did not issue a collective critique of the WSIS experience until a month after the event. Civil society organisations also gained substantially through opportunities for networking (during the extended, four-year, preparatory process) and for information sharing and improving understanding (through the exhibitions and "informal summits" accompanying each main summit session). However, civil society participation was uneven: Southern CSOs were under-represented compared with Northern CSOs, especially during PrepComs; and mainstream development NGOs were conspicuous by their absence, undermining the credibility of much civil society input on development questions.

Issues concerning civil society participation at the national level have been considered in the previous chapter. At the international level, the challenges raised for civil society by the summit – and by comparable future events – seem to fall into two main categories: concerning whether to participate, and how to do so.

The former relates largely to the cost and cost-effectiveness of participation. The cost of taking part in international decision-making processes is high – as described for developing countries in the previous section. Participation in WSIS involved not merely a presence at two plenary summit sessions – that alone was expensive, but would have gained no influence on its own – but involvement in a four-year process, including a substantial number of international meetings and all of the interaction required with other civil society organisations in order to make participation worthwhile. The diagram derived from "Louder Voices", which is included in the previous section, is as relevant to civil society participation as it is to that of developing countries.

No civil society organisation can afford to take a decision to spend so many resources on one activity with ease. Few developing country civil society organisations, in particular, can afford to do so, unless they are sponsored by donors. The costs alone therefore dictate that only the best-endowed and the most determined civil society organisations will play a full part in a summit like WSIS (especially if, as in WSIS, a two-phase approach effectively doubles the cost). Civil society participation is therefore always likely to be skewed as described above. Assessments of cost-effectiveness also come into play. In practice, in WSIS, civil society organisations focusing on information rights and ICD were more likely to see engagement in WSIS as more cost-effective for them than civil society organisations primarily concerned with mainstream rights or development issues. Mainstream development organisations also had another, bigger priority: the Millennium Review Summit, which also took place in 2005.

The first challenge for civil society, therefore, concerns what it collectively can do to correct the distortions in civil society participation arising from this skewed representation. This challenge has two dimensions (in addition to issues concerning the social representation of participation, e.g. by gender):

- Firstly, at an international level, there is the dimension of geography. Civil society participation in WSIS was less representative of the South than participation in official delegations. This under-representation of the South was more marked in PrepComs - and so in input to negotiations - than at the summits themselves. It was reinforced by the greater likelihood that Northern governments undertook formal or informal consultation processes than that Southern governments did so, and by the higher technical and negotiating skill levels in Northern than in Southern civil society. It is even more marked in WSIS follow-up processes. This undermines civil society's claim to speak on behalf of the disadvantaged within negotiations. (At national level, it is paralleled by the over-representation of metropolitan and the under-representation of provincial civil society in national decision-making processes.)

- Secondly, at both national and international levels, there is the dimension of thematic diversity. Discussions at WSIS potentially affected a wide range of civil society organisations - in particular, those involved directly in ICTs, those concerned with rights issues, those working in mainstream development. In practice, at both national and international levels, mainstream development NGOs had very little involvement in civil society engagement with WSIS. This was as true of industrial as of developing countries. The result was that civil society input into WSIS' discussions on the application of ICTs in mainstream development lacked mainstream development NGO participation.

One response to this challenge has been to appeal for external funding of civil society participants, but this includes the risks discussed above in respect of developing country participation. Also, while it addresses the question of cost, it does not address that of cost-effectiveness. If an organisation does not consider it cost-effective to use its person-time to attend a meeting, paying for it to do so does not make it cost-effective.

Turning next to a second challenge. The central question concerning how to participate, in past summits, has tended to be a choice between participation within the main stream of discussion and declamation from without. Exclusion from the main decision-making forum in past summits has encouraged the latter, but WSIS offered more participation space "within the tent" than its predecessors had done. Civil society's demand for multistakeholder involvement in decision-making – not just in summits, but also in permanent decision-making fora like the ITU or WTO – implies that civil society as a whole wishes to move from outside the tent to inside, from a position of opposition to a position of constructive engagement. This in turn raises a number of challenges for civil society, in particular concerning unity of purpose and representational character. It is worth looking in more detail at the implications of multistakeholderism in order to address these.

Multistakeholder participation in decision-making might be said to do three things:

- To supplement democratic input

- To improve the quality of understanding of particular issues and the concerns of particular groups, which are otherwise marginal to decision-making processes

- To improve the quality of decision-making and the consent of citizens to decisions made.

These advantages of multistakeholder engagement in decision-making are recognised within the shared decision-making structures in most national contexts, but less recognised in international decision-making.

Civil society advocacy of multistakeholder processes, within WSIS and elsewhere, has been built around the demand for a voice - to supplement the democratic articulation of public opinion in more democratic societies; to substitute for it in societies that are less democratic; to ensure the articulation of minority as well as majority, marginalised as well as advantaged, concerns and views, etc. The absence of a voice is the immediate issue; less attention has (naturally enough) been paid to the use that could be made of it if and when multistakeholder processes are put in place.

The purpose of a voice, however, is not simply to articulate an alternative perspective to that held by government, business or any other stakeholder, but to engage in political debate with them and seek to achieve shifts in policy and practice which are consistent with civil society's broad objectives. Multistakeholderism, in other words, is not a synonym for the more effective articulation of opposition. Like democracy, it implies engagement and compromise with alternative points of view, at least in building areas of common understanding or perimeters of consensus within which future policy options can be developed. The WGIG illustrated this meaning of multistakeholderism effectively in the way that it developed mutual understanding between people with different stakeholder perspectives and thereby shaped subsequent debate.

In practice, multistakeholder engagement requires consent to a set of rules within which multistakeholder participation takes place. These may be formal (who votes) or informal (how people treat each other), but a functioning multistakeholder forum must have an ethos which embraces diversity of opinion and a multistakeholder decision-making forum must have formal mechanisms and the informal consent of its participants for making decisions.

WSIS experience suggests that civil society as a whole has not yet sufficiently debated its engagement in this process. As an umbrella, the term civil society covers both organisations that are strongly positive about engagement with other stakeholders and those that are more hostile to both or either governments and businesses. Active multistakeholder processes are likely to throw this difference of approach into much higher relief. They are still highly controversial among governments, and many governments will be happy to see them fail. Unless there is effective engagement with new steps towards multistakeholder engagement then the trend towards it could reverse. The willingness of (at least most members of) all stakeholder groups to engage constructively with one another, which was notably demonstrated at the first meeting of the Internet Governance Forum in late 2006, could have importance well beyond the ICT sector.

The second challenge for civil society is how it handles this transition in ethos in moving into multistakeholder environments; how, in other words, it understands "constructive engagement". Divisions of opinion on this were not terribly apparent during the majority of WSIS, but did become more evident towards the end as compromise was being reached in Internet governance. Now that they are beginning to have a voice, civil society organisations within the ICT sector need to think about how to handle differences of view about how to use it most constructively. This could be important, for example, if the review of the nature of stakeholder roles initiated by the 2006 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference opens up new spaces for civil society participation in its decision-making processes.

Many governments, as noted above, remain suspicious of civil society participation in decision-making. For some, this is because they fear that civil society will expose their unrepresentativeness or breach barriers to popular participation and freedom of expression in their own territories. Interviews with government and IGO participants in WSIS, however, make clear that the reasons for suspicion of civil society are more complex than this, and these need to be understood by civil society organisations as they campaign for and enter into stronger decision-making roles.

The nature and meaning of "civil society" differs markedly between countries. In many, civil society organisations are considered hostile by governments: either because they are (in practice) opposition organisations, or because they represent social groups which are excluded from power or considered hostile by government (trade unions, women's groups, ethnic minorities, religious entities), or because they articulate policies or demand rights (such as freedoms of expression, association and behaviour) which are not granted within the society in question. These are essentially political issues relating civil society to governments and inter-governmental

agencies, and exist in many ways because civil society is doing its job. However, the term "civil society" has also been used by organisations which seek themselves to suppress social freedoms, or which have abused their position to exploit the communities they claim to represent. And civil society is often regarded as suspect because of problems of uncertainty about the quality of representation. Civil society organisations often represent particular social groups - women, workers, young people, consumers, etc. - which are, by definition, not representative of society as a whole. Collectively, a coalition of all civil society actors within a country may be broadly representative of society as a whole, but equally it may not: it may, for example, be disproportionately representative of the powerful or (conversely) of the marginalised, of particular ethnic or religious groups, of men or women, of the landed not the landless, the employed rather than the unemployed. Civil society's political character, collectively, may be broadly consistent with that of society as a whole, or it may not; in which case it may be either pro- or anti-government. In some societies, civil society organisations may even be surrogates for the state - an issue that arose concerning local NGOs during the Tunis phase of WSIS.

These criticisms are similar to those made of private sector representation: that, for example, the CCBI and its partners in the WSIS process represented bigger international businesses rather the private sector as a whole. How representation is perceived is as important here as how it is actually constructed. The third challenge for civil society, therefore, is to recognise and address concerns within other stakeholder groups about the quality of representation that it, collectively, offers, in order to build confidence in it as a player within multistakeholder processes and so take advantage of the opportunities they represent. A key issue here is the need for individual civil society organisations to recognise that civil society's credibility depends on its diversity; that there is, in fact, no single civil society perspective on a particular issue (such as intellectual property rights); and in particular that attempts to appropriate the authority of civil society to individual agency objectives undermine both credibility and civil society's ability to act collectively.

Fourthly, most of the debate about multistakeholderism within civil society has concerned the relationship between civil society and government (or inter-governmental organisations). Much less attention has been paid to the relationship between civil society and the private sector. This is natural: it is governments and IGOs that are felt to deny civil society a voice. In addition, many civil society organisations are ideologically hostile to private business. The UN system, however, regards both groups as effectively one – "non-government" as opposed to "government". The first phase of WSIS showed strong antipathy by some government delegations to both civil society and private sector

participation; and led to substantial cooperation between civil society and private sector representatives in jointly demanding a voice. Partly as a result, there was much more constructive dialogue between civil society and the private sector during the remainder of WSIS than had been the case in previous summits.

This is something that offers some scope for the future. Debates at WSIS showed that there were a number of areas in which civil society and the private sector had common cause, notably but not exclusively in terms of participation in decision-making itself. These included issues such as openness to innovation, liberalisation of state-controlled infrastructure and government control over content, developing better understanding of the way ICT markets work and the interrelationship between policy, service provision and consumer behaviour. There is scope, largely unexplored, for cooperation in the future in these and other areas. Formal mechanisms for building on this are weak, though good personal relationships do exist, as a result of WSIS, across this stakeholder divide. However, many civil society organisations have ideological reservations about the private sector. The fourth challenge is, therefore, whether and how civil society and the private sector build their relationship within an increasingly multistakeholder environment.

A fifth challenge concerns the quality of civil society input. Most of the issues discussed in international ICT fora are highly complex technical questions. Detailed and sophisticated understanding of them is necessary to achieve credibility. Most debates are dominated by articulate people, highly informed about these issues and supported by strong research and analytical teams. It is difficult to break into this inner circle of ICT policymaking – as new delegates to ITU study groups are quick to find – and easy for dominant decision-makers to dismiss new participants as ignorant or misinformed.

If the struggle for the right to participate is won, how civil society announces its arrival will have a major impact on its influence in the medium and longer term. Other stakeholders will look for a positive approach and for substantial understanding of the issues. This is much more important in permanent decision-making fora, which deal in detail, than in summits, which deal in broad principles. For civil society to be effective, therefore, its first priority will have to be identification of those aspects of ICT policy which merit concentrated attention and the resources needed to address these effectively. A scattergun approach, built around assumptions rather than knowledge, or principles rather than pragmatism, is unlikely to build influence. Criteria for the selection of priority issues need to be developed. These might include:

- Issues where outcomes are of high significance to citizens (such as access, connectivity and information rights)

- Issues where civil society has a common shared perspective (i.e. few internal disagreements) and a distinctive point of view

- Issues which are currently being handled in a highly technocratic manner but in which broader social and environmental issues, for example, could enhance the outcomes of decisions reached.

Capacity-building obviously lies at the heart of this challenge.

Finally, WSIS suggests a number of challenges concerning the modalities of civil society participation.

The diversity of civil society makes coherent participation more difficult for it than it is for a relatively homogeneous stakeholder group like the private sector. No interviewee from civil society for this project thought it feasible for civil society to operate in WSIS through an umbrella group like the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI). CONGO – the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations – sought to encourage CSO participation in WSIS, but has no policy coordinating role. The civil society caucus structure provided the nearest equivalent to CCBI's coordination but its role was more to reflect the diversity of civil society interests and to broker support within the wider civil society community for the articulation of particular points than it was to develop a common set of ideas and principles. It was only in smaller and relatively narrow specialist caucuses – on child welfare or disability, for example - that civil society could achieve comparable unity of purpose to that exhibited by the private sector.

The more diverse civil society is, in short, the more difficulty it is likely to have in establishing a common position on issues of controversy within it, except where these are concerned directly with the representation of civil society itself. And where common positions are established, they are less likely to be the result of considered and informed debate: there is more risk than there is in more homogeneous groupings that agreed positions will be either lowest common denominators or uncritical endorsements of the (perhaps controversial) views of particular civil society entities participating in a particular forum.

The second phase of WSIS also saw differences of view emerge about the permanence of caucuses. Previously, caucuses have been specific to the summit concerned. Continuity was required, however, for a two-phase summit, and this gave the caucus structure more of an air of permanence. At least one regional caucus sought to develop structures such as an executive committee which are more appropriate to permanent organisations than to time-limited groupings. Similarly, the Internet Governance caucus continued to function after WSIS, as a preliminary to the Internet Governance Forum.

The fact that WSIS was held in two phases inevitably increased the continuity of those caucuses that were established. They did not simply need to maintain continuity through a series of preparatory committees, but also over two plenary sessions: a four-year process which is very long in terms of civil society activity. Interviewees are agreed that this helped substantially to increase networking among civil society organisations and certainly established some new bilateral relationships and working associations which may have considerable longevity. However, there is disagreement about whether WSIS caucuses themselves should be maintained post-WSIS. The Internet Governance caucus is a case in point. This has, in effect, continued working in relation to the WSIS successor body, the Internet Governance Forum, and it seems likely that some comparable caucus to that established during WSIS will be necessary for civil society coordination in relation to the IGF. However, this need not be continuous with its predecessor. The potential constituency for the IGF is different from that for WSIS – perhaps more narrowly confined to Internet governance issues, potentially more widely inclusive among Internet-oriented agencies. If the existing caucus does continue into the IGF, it is difficult to see that it will not become more formalised and permanent in character – perhaps a kind of civil society bureau rather than a caucus in the sense that it has been to date.

The sixth and final challenge for civil society therefore concerns how it develops and maintains continuity of thinking and strategisation in international organisations, especially if it does gain greater space for participation. Interviewees have, for example, reported that it has proved difficult for civil society organisations to maintain networks and relationships established during WSIS in the post-WSIS period without the framework of WSIS meetings in which to operate – with the exception of the Internet governance arena. It may be that civil society needs to look for more permanent ways of sharing expertise and in particular sharing experience between participants in different ICT fora, in order to maximise the value that can be obtained from such multistakeholder participation that evolves.

Recommendations on capacity-building

Capacity-building, as noted earlier, is crucial to multistakeholder participation. If a multistakeholder forum is to function effectively, its participants need to have confidence in the capacity of that forum to reach conclusions which are built on informed understanding of the issues with which it is concerned; that the quality of decision-making, in other words, should be based on the knowledge that is available within the forum rather than the ignorance of its least-informed participant. Lack of expertise constrains the participation of those who are poorly-informed, but it also reduces the quality of decision-making, in particular the likelihood that consensus can be reached on more innovative approaches. The challenge here is to ensure that multistakeholder fora are both inclusive and informed.

In fact, two capacity challenges are involved here – one concerning information and knowledge per se; the other concerning the multistakeholder participation processes themselves. Participants in multistakeholder processes need to understand what they are talking about; but they also need to understand why other stakeholders have different perspectives and different priorities from themselves, and how to work with those other stakeholders in order to identify viable destinations and viable ways of reaching them.

The first of these challenges – basic information and knowledge – was identified strongly in the "Louder Voices" report. Developing country participants have found themselves disadvantaged in many international fora because they lack basic technical or policy understanding of the issues that are being discussed. They simply are not able to keep track of all of the issues involved, or to engage in discussion about them with the depth of expertise of key actors in industrial country or private sector delegations. These difficulties are compounded by insufficient presence in discussions (for example, participation in plenaries but not in side meetings at which the real action takes place); by limited coordination with other developing country delegations facing similar problems; and by poor knowledge management within the national decision-making environment (for example, different personnel attending different meetings in the same decision-making chain; lack of dialogue between government departments). Civil society participants face many of these same problems (though they may have better networking than can be found between official delegations from different countries), as do others seeking to enter decision-making spaces from which they have previously been absent or excluded.

A number of initiatives are needed to address these deficiencies, several of which are discussed in the "Louder Voices" report. Critical among them is the need for new participants to access reliable, up-to-date information on issues under discussion in decision-making processes and on the progress that has been made within those processes towards resolving them. Inter-governmental organisations are often much better at explaining themselves and their concerns to insiders than to outsiders. Both formally and informally, they tend to push newcomers to the margins rather than welcoming them into the fold. Key actors often look to newcomers more as voting fodder for their propositions than as potential contributors to more diverse discourse. Overcoming these problems requires a lot of effort on the part of "newbies". It would be very much easier for them, however, if they had available

information sources on whose accuracy, timeliness and impartiality they could rely. The "Louder Voices" report saw this as a crucial element in any effort to extend participation in technical and policy decision-making, and APC has initiated discussion with other stakeholder groups on such information sources within the context of the Internet Governance Forum.

But knowing the issues is never sufficient on its own. It is also important to understand the processes through which decisions are made. The processes of international discourse are often arcane, and capacity-building is needed for newcomers on these, too, as well as on the issues themselves. Just as important as the formal processes, however, can be the ethos of decision-making within particular institutions. New actors, particularly those who have been excluded from processes in the past, often have a negative perception of the processes in which they have not previously participated. To function effectively within these processes, even if continuing to reject them, it is important for newcomers to understand their ethos, the reasons why they are considered effective by existing participants, and ways of maximising effectiveness within them. Moving from exclusion to participation can demand quite a substantial re-evaluation of process issues and attitudes to process.

Finally, it should be recognised that the objective of securing multistakeholder engagement in decision-making is to gain the opportunity not for a fight to the death between competing perspectives but for joint participation in the search for a way forward that is acceptable to all, or at least has the consent of at least the large majority – a way forward that can be shared between perspectives. Multistakeholder decision-making fora are not natural environments for ideologues, but for pragmatists. This can be uncomfortable for new participants with a strongly ideological bent. The opportunity to learn about and understand others' perspectives is, however, crucial to their engagement in such fora. One of the WGIG's strengths was that it provided this opportunity. Much the same experience was repeated for many participants in the first meeting of the Internet Governance Forum in October/November 2006, an event which many participants left saying that they now understood more clearly why those who had different perspectives from themselves held those different points of view.

WSIS follow-up

As noted in Chapter 3, the WSIS outcome documents make relatively few formal "commitments", although a substantial summary of specific commitments could be drawn from article 90 of the Tunis Agenda. This set of commitments can be found in Annex 3. The Tunis Agenda also commits summit signatories:

to review and follow up progress in bridging the digital divide, taking into account the different levels of development among nations, so as to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, assessing the effectiveness of investment and international cooperation efforts in building the Information Society, identifying gaps as well as deficits in investment and devising strategies to address them.[4]

The Tunis Agenda initiated three main follow-up processes for WSIS:

- A formal reporting mechanism was established, to be coordinated by a UN Group on the Information Society, reporting to the Chief Executives Board, and ECOSOC, reporting to the General Assembly

- The UN Secretary-General was asked to facilitate the establishment of an Internet Governance Forum, to consider a range of Internet issues

- A series of action line initiatives led by different international agencies was agreed as the basis for implementing the other WSIS outcomes.

Both the Internet Governance Forum and the action-line follow-up process were described in the WSIS outcome documents as "multistakeholder" initiatives, though neither was formulated beyond this in much detail. This final section of the report looks at these two areas of WSIS follow-up that were agreed in Tunis, and considers how they fit into a wider post-WSIS scenario for both developing countries and non-governmental actors.

The Internet Governance Forum

Internet governance was the most contested policy area within WSIS. Given the intensity of disagreement about what should happen after WSIS, it is hardly surprising that the follow-up processes were themselves controversial. They consisted, on the one hand, of a commitment to "enhanced cooperation" which would "enable governments, on an equal footing, to carry out their roles and responsibilities, in international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet"[5] and, on the other, to the creation of an Internet Governance Forum which could discuss Internet issues but without decision-making powers. This Forum was given the mandate to:

a. Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.

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4   Tunis Agenda, article 119.

5   ibid., article 69.

b. Facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body.

c. Interface with appropriate intergovernmental organizations and other institutions on matters under their purview.

d. Facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities.

e. Advise all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world.

f. Strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries.

g. Identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations.

h. Contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise.

i. Promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes.

j. Discuss, inter alia, issues relating to critical Internet resources.

k. Help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users.

l. Publish its proceedings.[6]

This mandate, which derives largely from civil society text, left a good deal to be settled. It contained, potentially, a great deal of work, though the IGF lacked the resources to cover these in detail, and most participants in WSIS were reluctant to see it acquiring too great a degree of authority, at least before they knew what it would do.

The IGF, therefore, was not intended to be a governance agency itself, but rather an agency that could consider issues of governance. It "will", the Tunis Agenda declared "be multilateral, multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent. To that end," it "could" (note the change of verb):

a) Build on the existing structures of Internet governance, with special emphasis on the complementarity between all stakeholders involved in this process - governments, business entities, civil society and intergovernmental organizations.

b) Have a lightweight and decentralised structure that would be subject to periodic review.

c) Meet periodically, as required, [perhaps in parallel with other UN conferences].[7]

There was a lot here that was contested. Some wanted to confine the IGF's role narrowly to issues that are universally thought of as Internet governance. Some saw it as an opportunity to continue the arguments about the future of ICANN, and about the potential for other organisations – such as the ITU – to oversee the Internet as a whole (even though this was outside the terms of the Tunis consensus). Others wanted the IGF to exploit the breadth of its mandate, to discuss wider issues which are not generally thought of as Internet governance per se but cut into the mandates of other WSIS follow-up processes and those of other inter-governmental bodies – issues such as infrastructure, applications and content, privacy and security.

The initial format for the IGF was hammered out at a couple of preparatory meetings, led by the same top management team (Nitin Desai and Markus Kummer) that coordinated the WGIG, now reappointed to this role by the UN Secretary-General. The IGF Advisory Group met in May 2006 and agreed an overall theme – "Internet Governance for Development" – and four subsidiary themes – openness, security, diversity and access – for the first meeting of the Forum, scheduled for the end of October 2006. "Capacity-building," they agreed, would be "a cross-cutting priority."[8]

In practice, the first meeting of the Internet Governance Forum is generally considered a considerable success. About 1500 people attended the three-day meeting in Athens in October/November 2006, from the whole range of stakeholder communities, including very senior figures in Internet affairs past and present. Perhaps uniquely in an event held under UN auspices, no distinctions were drawn between government officials and IGO personnel, private sector and civil society participants. Everyone was treated equally, and this equality was essentially an equality of individuals at least as much as of stakeholder groups. Discussion centred not on formal propositions but on panels of experts drawn from across the stakeholder spectrum, facilitated by journalists who raised with them controversial issues of concern to members of the audience. As a result, as one very experienced IGO official put it to the author, hardly anyone spoke in the kind of code that masks controversy which is so common in other UN fora (not least among them WSIS). Discussion was also very broad, ranging across the whole range of Internet questions, certainly not restricted to those falling readily within what is normally understood as "governance".

In many ways, this reflected the ethos of the WGIG; not surprisingly, perhaps, as the same top management team that led the WGIG was responsible for leading the IGF.

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6   ibid., article 72.

7   ibid., article 73.

8   www.intgovforum.org/meeting.htm.

Multistakeholderism was central to how it worked, and in some cases rather formally so. Panels were always made up of multistakeholder groups, and multistakeholder organisation was also a prerequisite for sanctioning workshops on the forum fringe. This had considerable impact on the overall atmosphere at the meeting, and the fact that most participants felt that they left Athens knowing more about issues that were often very controversial than they had known when they arrived – and, in particular, knowing more about why others thought the way they did. The IGF, in short, made it easier to explore others' paradigms, less easy to demand agreement with one's own.

Of course, a fundamental factor in this was the fact that the IGF had no decision-making powers. It is much easier to explore ideas if you are not asked to vote for them at the end of the week; much easier, too, to form collaborations (or "dynamic coalitions") across stakeholder divides, though how successful those that were formed prove to be in practice remains to be seen. The basic concept of a non-decision-making forum will remain, and this gives the IGF capacity to act as a global capacity-building forum on the Internet (particularly in the sense of sharing perspectives and ideas), though the format will need to develop year-on-year if it is not to become stale.

Action line implementation

Follow-up activity for the remainder of the WSIS agenda was spelt out in paragraphs 99 to 122 of the Tunis Agenda. These include a number of different tiers and types of activity, described together as "a mechanism for implementation and follow-up at national, regional and international levels." The overall framework for this was summarised as follows:

a. At the national level, the Agenda encourages governments to incorporate national e-strategies within national development plans, and to include commentary on ICD within relevant country assessment reports.

b. At the regional level, the Agenda recognises the potential for regional IGOs and UN regional commissions to organise follow-up activities in conjunction with governments, and the desirability of these including all stakeholders.

c. At the international/global level, the Agenda requests UN agencies and other IGOs to "facilitate activities among different stakeholders, including civil society and the business sector, to help national governments in their implementation efforts."

It was agreed that WSIS follow-up "should not require the creation of any new operational bodies." This was consistent with donor countries' perception of the importance of mainstreaming ICT/ICD, and with their earlier

rejection of a UN-managed Digital Solidarity Fund. However, specific follow-up activities were agreed, including the following:

1. The UN Secretary-General and Chief Executives Board were asked to set up a UN Group on the Information Society, made up of UN family entities, "to facilitate the implementation of WSIS outcomes," with leadership of this Group to come from amongst the ITU, the UNDP and UNESCO.

2. The Secretary-General was also asked to report through ECOSOC to the General Assembly by June 2006 on "the modalities of the interagency coordination of the implementation of WSIS outcomes."

3. ECOSOC was asked to review the mandate and composition of the UN Commission on Science and Technology in the light of WSIS' outcomes, "taking into account the multistakeholder approach."

4. The ITU's ICT Opportunity Index and Digital Opportunity Index were endorsed alongside other sets of indicators on ICT performance.

Finally, the Agenda said the following about broader multistakeholder follow-up of particular activities:

The experience of, and the activities undertaken by, UN agencies in the WSIS process - notably the ITU, UNESCO and the UNDP - should continue to be used to their fullest extent. These three agencies should play leading facilitating roles in the implementation of the Plan of Action and organize a meeting of moderators/facilitators of action lines [i.e. the action lines included in the Geneva Plan of Action]....

The coordination of multi-stakeholder implementation activities would help to avoid duplication of activities. This should include, inter alia, information exchange, creation of knowledge, sharing of best practices, and assistance in developing multi-stakeholder and public/private partnerships.[9]

Responsibility for action lines was allocated between agencies as set out in the box below.

The initial allocation of responsibility for action line leadership appears to have originated in discussions during 2004. It is not clear if, at that time, this was expected to form the framework for a follow-up process in due course. It certainly reflected inter-agency rivalries within the UN system, and these surfaced again during the final negotiations and in the aftermath of WSIS as, firstly, approximate equality was required between the three main UN agencies concerned (the ITU, the UNDP and UNESCO) and, secondly, non-ICT-specialist agencies (such as the WHO and the FAO) asserted their primacy over the ITU in follow-up processes concerned with their specialist areas. The ITU downgraded

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9   Tunis Agenda, articles 109-110.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR WSIS ACTION LINES		
Action Line	**Initial proposed Moderators/facilitators**	**moderators/facilitators agreed in February 2006**
C1. The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development	ECOSOC/UN Regional Commissions/ITU	UNDESA
C2. Information and communication infrastructure	ITU	ITU
C3. Access to information and knowledge	ITU/UNESCO	UNESCO
C4. Capacity building	UNDP/UNESCO/ITU/UNCTAD	UNDP
C5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs	ITU	ITU
C6. Enabling environment	ITU/UNDP/UN REGIONAL COMMISSIONS/UNCTAD	UNDP
C7. ICT Applications		
¬ E-government	¬ UNDP/ITU	• UNDESA
¬ E-business	¬ WTO/UNCTAD/ITU/UPU	• UNCTAD
¬ E-learning	¬ UNESCO/ITU/UNIDO	• UNESCO
¬ E-health	¬ WHO/ITU	• WHO
¬ E-employment	¬ ILO/ITU	• ILO
¬ E-environment	¬ WHO/WMO/UNEP/ UN-Habitat/ITU/ICAO	• WMO
¬ E-agriculture	¬ FAO/ITU	• FAO
¬ E-science	¬ UNESCO/ITU/UNCTAD	• UNESCO
C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content	UNESCO	UNESCO
C9. Media	UNESCO	UNESCO
C10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society	UNESCO/ECOSOC/WHO	UNESCO
C11. International and regional cooperation	UN regional commissions/ UNDP/ITU/UNESCO/ECOSOC	UNDESA

its role, particularly in respect of action lines C7, following an inter-agency meeting in February 2006, with the result set out in column three of the table in the box above.

This somewhat amorphous collection of activities has been slower than the Internet Governance Forum to get underway. A meeting of UN agencies in Geneva in February 2006 refined the list of lead agencies for these action lines (see above) and suggested procedures, principally for information exchange between lead agencies. This was followed (not, it may be noted, preceded) by a multi-stakeholder consultation meeting, also in Geneva, attended by around 50 participants - mostly from the lead UN agencies with some participants from Geneva missions, civil society and the private sector. Substantial concerns were expressed at this meeting by both civil society and private sector participants concerning the difficulty which they would face in participating effectively in such a disparate process, and recommending restructuring of the action lines into clusters. Civil society and private sector participants were also concerned about the mechanistic character of the procedures agreed between UN agencies; the weakness of modalities for multistakeholder participation; and the apparent focus

of lead agencies on "stocktaking" rather than proactive approaches to implementation.

The first "facilitation meeting" of any action line (C2 – "Infrastructure") was held in Doha during the ITU's World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC). This was attended by about 40 people, including some national delegations, but had almost no representation from civil society or development agencies, and none from other UN family IGOs, which were not present in Doha.[10] Most other action line processes held their first meetings in Geneva during the fortnight surrounding the first "World Information Society Day" (an extended World Telecommunication Day, 17 May 2006). These were also sparsely attended. The last few action lines did not meet until October 2006.

Participants in these May meetings felt they were a mixed bag. Some saw quite spirited discussion between a variety of stakeholders and generated some interesting ideas about future activity. Others struggled to keep the conversation going. None looked like the beating heart of a dynamic process that would prove a substantial legacy for WSIS. Follow up for most has been minimal, though UNESCO has established online facilities for those action lines where it holds the lead. Future meetings were not scheduled on the WSIS website (still maintained by the ITU), at the end of January 2007, though it is expected these will be held in May 2007.[11]

Many participants felt that the May 2006 meetings illustrated a number of weaknesses in the action line structure, which are likely to determine whether or not these will form an effective follow-up process. Key points made in this context include the following:

1) The purpose of the action line process is unclear. Formally, it is billed as being to do with "implementation". However, the action lines themselves cannot implement anything - they have neither the mandate to do so from participating agencies nor the resources required. In practice, implementation is a matter for IGOs, governments and other actors who may participate in action line meetings; while the action lines themselves are, at best, mechanisms for information exchange, monitoring and interchange of ideas. There is little enthusiasm for such activity among some important actors, notably bilateral development agencies.

2) The number of action lines - nine or sixteen depending on how they are counted - and their diverse leadership arrangements make it difficult for them to address the issues concerned cohesively. It is ironic that a summit which emphasised the holistic nature of the information

society should have mandated a follow-up process that is structured so incohesively. Many of the issues for discussion within action lines are cross-cutting, and require interaction between them. Civil society suggestions for clustering have been welcomed by some, but not all, senior figures in action line leadership, and clustering will be challenging to achieve, especially where action lines have different UN lead agencies.

3) The large number of action lines makes it very difficult for many stakeholders to participate effectively. No civil society organisation has the resources to participate effectively in more than a few such action lines. Few, if any, developing country governments will do so - though some may participate in meetings held in Geneva through their Geneva missions, these missions will not provide the continuity of specialist input required for any proactive work. The private sector, too, is likely to be largely absent. Narrowly defined action lines, in other words, are unlikely to attract substantial multistakeholder involvement, especially if they seem to add less value than other activities which are currently underway. Participation at the initial meetings in Geneva during 2006 was numerically sparse, with sufficiently little representation from developing countries, civil society and the private sector for meeting chairs to express concern about the capacity of meetings to make decisions on future action line activity.

4) The value added by action lines will be limited if they are confined to activities such as "information exchange" and "sharing of best practices", as suggested in the Tunis Agenda and by some UN agencies and governments in action line meetings. There are three principal reasons for this:

• Like all summits, WSIS' outcome documents focus on issues where there was agreement. While there is value in monitoring the implementation of agreed approaches, there is more value, for potential participants, in addressing challenges and areas of disagreement which did not form part of WSIS' overall consensus. These are not susceptible to a "stocktaking" approach.

• WSIS is over. In a fast-moving area such as ICT/ICD, potential participants in the action lines need and want to look forward to 2008 rather than back to 2003 (when the text within individual action lines was agreed). Focusing on the WSIS outcomes will look increasingly unattractive if it means diverting resources from more important and more immediate new issues.

• To be worthwhile, stocktaking must be based on critical evaluation. Listing activities has relatively little value, particularly where it consists of inviting governments (and other stakeholders) to contribute

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10   The World Bank was represented in Doha but did not attend this meeting.

11   See www.itu.int/wsis/implementation/ events_calendar.asp?year=2007&month=0.

their "success stories". Information exchange is unlikely to be comprehensive and can too easily become mutual self-congratulation, adding nothing to real understanding of the complex questions that need to be addressed.

In addition, it is difficult to see how action line meetings can match other established meetings and online spaces as fora for "information exchange" and "sharing of best practice".

5) The present structure for the action lines does not address the paradigm gap between ICT and mainstream development issues. The action line meetings in May 2006 were dominated by ICT/ICD professionals. While mainstream sector professionals may participate in sectoral applications sub-line activities (which were slowest to get underway), their presence is needed throughout the follow-up process if that is to address information society issues from a development rather than an ICT sectoral perspective. The ITU's original role as sole lead in the C2 (Infrastructure) action line is a case in point: as the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms demonstrated, infrastructure is a matter of finance and of socio-economic development (from demand to application) as much as of technology.

6) The action lines have no resources. No funding is available from the UN to make them work, and WSIS implementation is not likely to be seen as sufficient of a priority in itself for any other agencies to fund it, even for an individual action line.

With hindsight, in short, it would seem that too much attention was paid during the WSIS PrepCom discussions about follow-up to resolving potential conflict between agencies, and too little was paid to the effectiveness of the structure agreed - especially to its cohesion and inclusiveness. By the time of the first group of action line facilitation meetings in May 2006, it was clear that considerable change had already occurred in a number of areas - for example, in IGO approaches to infrastructure finance - and that implementing WSIS was already beginning to look to many participants like last year's rather than next year's agenda. "Real" WSIS follow-up, in other words, was already taking place - internationally in contexts such as the World Bank and European Union African infrastructure initiatives, and in national programmes such as the "e-Lanka" initiative in Sri Lanka.

In addition, an international multistakeholder community was already in process of establishing the Global Alliance on ICT and Development, as a successor to the UN ICT Task Force, with a mandate to facilitate and promote the integration of information and communication technology into development activities through a "multi-stakeholder cross-sectoral platform and forum that will bring together all stakeholders representing relevant constituencies."[12] While opinions are divided about how useful or effective the Global Alliance will be, it looks more like a post-WSIS multistakeholder forum, addressing ICT/ICD issues holistically and on the basis of an evolving agenda, than the follow-up process designated by the WSIS outcome documents. Certainly, it looks more comparable with the Internet Governance Forum than do the action lines. If it secures the participation at a senior level of many who may otherwise have been prepared to put time into individual (or, more likely, clustered) action lines, then there has to be a likelihood that it - rather than the mechanisms established by the Tunis Agenda - will play the substantive WSIS follow-up role (if that role is taken up at all). On the other hand, civil society has significant reservations about the extent to which the Global Alliance will prove to be inclusive.

Potential actors in the action line follow-up process therefore have serious questions to ask about participation - in particular: "is this likely to prove effective?" and "is this likely to distract us from other, potentially more productive activities?" This applies across the stakeholder spectrum - to governments (including both developing country and donor governments), IGOs, the private sector and civil society organisations. At the very least, civil society and other actors should carefully monitor the Global Alliance and ensure that they generate effective input into it proportionate to its apparent likely effectiveness, as that emerges during the coming year.

At the same time, however, some actors have felt obliged to make an effort to see what will emerge from the action line process and may continue to do so in the short term. This was, after all, set up as a multistakeholder initiative, and it would be difficult for civil society simply to opt out of it. The action lines, it is clear, are unlikely to be able to undertake any comprehensive monitoring of WSIS outcomes. However, they did potentially provide a space for multistakeholder discussion of issues, and it initially seemed possible that they could generate worthwhile dialogue if they focused more narrowly, and more proactively, on target issues. This at least seemed worth exploring during the May 2006 meetings, perhaps through small multistakeholder partnerships – a civil society grouping, a private sector partner and an IGO, for example, jointly exploring an area of ICT policy which has real importance for the future. As things stand, most action lines are unlikely to meet again in formal session until May 2007. In these circumstances, it should not be difficult to determine whether any action lines have the capacity in practice to generate worthwhile activity. If none has generated substantive work during the intervening year, then it is unlikely that these action lines will have much life left in them.

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12   www.un-gaid.org/about.

Conclusion

Attitudes to WSIS follow-up vary considerably according to the perceptions which actors have of WSIS as a whole. Supporters of the summit see its follow-up process as a potential springboard for future activity. Those who regard WSIS as a distraction - including many in the donor community - are unprepared to commit further time and resources to it. Their lack of commitment to follow-up is reinforced by the amorphous character and disparate organisation of the action lines. From the perspective of January 2007, certainly, the follow-up process looks weak, except where the Internet Governance Forum is concerned.

In the light of earlier chapters of this report, this is perhaps unsurprising. WSIS did not have a major impact in terms of new thinking on either rights or development. It may have begun new processes on Internet governance and infrastructure finance, but these are being pursued elsewhere. New ICT issues are constantly emerging. In this context, the most important thing about WSIS is probably that it is in the past. Future action – whether by developing countries, civil society or any other actor – needs to be forward-looking. Time will tell whether WSIS is seen as a reference point (like the Maitland Commission), a turning point or largely an irrelevance; but whichever of these hindsight eventually prefers, the conclusion of this report is that it is not the best starting point for new action on ICTs or ICD today. ◾

Annexes

Participation in WSIS summits

Country	Geneva Summit			Phase 2 PrepCom 2			Tunis Summit		
	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %
Afghanistan	6	100	0	1	100	0	4	100	0
Albania	3	67	33	1	100	0	3	100	0
Algeria	8	100	0	3	100	0	71	86	14
Andorra	10	80	20	4	75	25	3	67	33
Angola	13	100	0	3	100	0	68	87	13
Antigua and Barbuda									
Argentina	27	70	30	4	50	50	52	77	23
Armenia	24	88	12	5	100	0	32	81	19
Australia	14	64	36	6	67	33	16	81	19
Austria	39	62	38	12	75	25	46	74	26
Azerbaijan	36	92	8	11	100	0	64	94	6
Bahamas									
Bahrain	6	100	0	4	100	0	15	93	7
Bangladesh	54	93	7	7	100	0	10	100	0
Barbados	10	50	50	5	60	40	5	60	40
Belarus	27	89	11	4	100	0	2	100	0
Belgium	20	65	35	6	67	33	20	95	5
Belize	3	67	33						
Benin	16	81	19	3	100	0	13	85	15
Bhutan	5	60	40				4	75	25
Bolivia	30	57	43	1	0	100	5	100	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10	90	10	2	100	0	22	82	18
Botswana	30	57	43	8	100	0	16	88	12
Brazil	47	89	11	25	92	8	37	76	24
Brunei Darussalam	14	93	7	2	50	50	6	100	0
Bulgaria	23	78	22	3	67	33	18	83	17
Burkina Faso	9	89	11	6	100	0	11	100	0
Burundi	6	83	17	4	100	0	6	100	0
Cambodia	7	100	0	4	100	0	5	100	0
Cameroon	10	100	0	11	100	0	20	90	10
Canada	95	69	31	16	69	31	61	59	41
Cape Verde	10	100	0				3	67	33
Central African Republic	2	100	0				13	92	8
Chad	5	100	0	9	100	0	11	82	18
Chile	11	82	18	5	80	20	12	75	25
China	21	62	38	7	57	43	59	75	25

Country	Geneva Summit			Phase 2 PrepCom 2			Tunis Summit		
	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %
Colombia	10	40	60	1	100	0	5	60	40
Comoros	13	77	23	4	50	50	15	93	7
Congo	23	96	4	5	100	0	37	89	11
Costa Rica	7	86	14	1	0	100	3	100	0
Côte d'Ivoire	19	95	5	5	100	0	27	89	11
Croatia	20	65	35	4	25	75	28	71	29
Cuba	86	72	28	6	100	0	32	75	25
Cyprus	5	60	40				1	100	0
Czech Republic	20	85	15	6	83	17	42	69	31
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	7	100	0				3	100	0
Democratic Republic of Congo	6	83	17	9	78	22	13	85	15
Denmark	16	50	50	9	44	56	17	59	41
Djibouti	6	100	0	1	100	0	15	100	0
Dominica									
Dominican Republic	10	40	60	5	20	80	51	55	45
Ecuador	9	67	33	7	86	14	10	70	30
Egypt	44	80	20	9	67	33	78	62	38
El Salvador	13	62	38	3	67	33	8	75	25
Equatorial Guinea	2	100	0				15	100	0
Eritrea	1	100	0	1	100	0	4	100	0
Estonia	13	85	15	4	50	50	6	83	17
Ethiopia	4	75	25	3	33	67	9	89	11
Fiji	2	50	50						
Finland	51	51	49	8	88	12	46	50	50
France	112	71	29	17	71	29	146	75	25
Gabon	67	76	24	6	100	0	29	90	10
Gambia	13	92	8	2	100	0	6	83	17
Georgia	11	91	9				4	75	25
Germany	59	71	29	12	67	33	69	64	36
Ghana	36	78	22	12	83	17	38	68	32
Greece	34	71	29	2	100	0	18	72	28
Grenada									
Guatemala	9	67	33	5	80	20	8	88	12
Guinea	3	67	33	13	92	8	34	91	9
Guinea-Bissau									
Guyana									
Haiti	4	100	0	4	100	0	10	90	10
Honduras	6	50	50	3	100	0	2	50	50
Hungary	9	78	22	4	100	0	15	80	20
Iceland	16	56	44	2	50	50	9	67	33
India	16	94	6	6	100	0	63	92	8
Indonesia	31	90	10	9	89	11	34	94	6

Country	Geneva Summit			Phase 2 PrepCom 2			Tunis Summit		
	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %
Iran	62	95	5	10	70	30	100	94	6
Iraq	7	100	0	6	67	33	6	67	33
Ireland	60	72	28	6	83	17	18	61	39
Israel	29	66	34	5	100	0	68	72	28
Italy	47	68	32	9	100	0	146	68	32
Jamaica	7	43	57	2	0	100	8	63	37
Japan	53	79	21	8	100	0	37	84	16
Jordan	16	69	31	4	50	50	19	42	58
Kazakhstan	5	100	0				3	100	0
Kenya	35	83	17	8	89	11	44	52	48
Kiribati									
Kuwait	16	94	6	3	100	0	44	70	30
Kyrgyzstan	26	85	15	1	100	0	1	100	0
Lao People's Democratic Republic	2	100	0				2	100	0
Latvia	18	56	44	5	60	40	18	61	39
Lebanon	14	86	14	3	100	0	63	81	19
Lesotho	19	74	26	5	40	60	19	74	26
Liberia									
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	9	89	11	8	100	0	12	92	8
Liechtenstein	4	100	0				3	67	33
Lithuania	16	69	31	6	50	50	12	75	25
Luxembourg	9	78	22	6	50	50	13	69	31
Madagascar	15	73	27				13	85	15
Malawi	6	83	27	4	100	0	9	89	11
Malaysia	125	61	39	11	73	27	38	66	44
Maldives	2	100	0	1	0	100	4	75	25
Mali	42	86	14	11	91	9	35	77	23
Malta	9	89	11	4	100	0	8	88	12
Marshall Islands							3	67	33
Mauritania	20	90	10	3	67	33	64	84	16
Mauritius	11	100	0	5	80	20	5	100	0
Mexico	20	85	15	4	100	0	15	93	7
Micronesia, (Federated States of)	2	100	0	1	100	0	4	100	0
Monaco	7	71	29	2	100	0	3	100	0
Mongolia	11	82	18	2	100	0			
Montenegro - see Republic of Montenegro									
Morocco	22	86	14	8	75	25	108	94	6
Mozambique	34	65	35	2	100	0	40	75	25
Myanmar	6	83	17	3	67	33	3	100	0
Namibia	10	70	30	4	50	50	12	58	42
Nauru									
Nepal	9	100	0	3	100	0	39	82	18

Country	Geneva Summit			Phase 2 PrepCom 2			Tunis Summit		
	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %
Netherlands	22	64	36	5	80	20	23	74	26
New Zealand	6	83	17	2	50	50	6	83	17
Nicaragua	17	59	41	6	83	17	8	100	0
Niger	7	86	14	2	50	50	30	77	23
Nigeria	64	81	19	6	83	17	50	82	18
Niue	2	100	0						
Norway	33	64	36	7	71	29	18	61	39
Oman	15	73	27	9	67	33	51	82	18
Pakistan	47	96	4	4	75	25	12	92	8
Palau	1	100	0						
Panama	7	57	43	1	100	0	2	100	0
Papua New Guinea	1	100	0				1	0	100
Paraguay	5	60	40	3	33	67	2	100	0
Peru	14	86	14	5	40	60	3	67	33
Philippines	16	69	31	3	67	33	10	100	0
Poland	14	86	14	7	71	29	12	75	25
Portugal	21	86	14	7	71	29	31	71	29
Qatar	21	95	5	5	60	40	69	93	7
Republic of Korea	38	84	16	9	100	0	42	88	12
Republic of Moldova	6	83	17	4	100	0	9	78	22
Republic of Montenegro									
Republic of Serbia									
Romania	102	78	22	12	75	25	67	64	36
Russian Federation	69	96	4	12	67	33	69	83	17
Rwanda	26	85	15	4	75	25	52	77	23
Saint Kitts and Nevis	3	100	0						
Saint Lucia	1	100	0						
Saint Vincent and The Grenadines									
Samoa	21	52	48	2	50	50	7	71	29
San Marino	1	0	100						
São Tomé and Príncipe							1	100	0
Saudi Arabia	27	100	0	10	100	0	19	100	0
Senegal	39	90	10	19	95	5	60	77	23
Serbia and Montenegro	21	67	33	9	56	44	15	67	33
Seychelles	1	100	0						
Sierra Leone	4	100	0				3	100	0
Singapore	10	70	30	4	50	50	7	71	29
Slovakia	19	79	21	10	80	20	17	88	12
Slovenia	11	73	27	4	75	25	4	100	0
Solomon Islands									
Somalia									
South Africa	79	67	33	16	25	75	95	74	26

Country	Geneva Summit			Phase 2 PrepCom 2			Tunis Summit		
	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %	Total	Male %	Fem. %
Spain	33	61	39	7	43	57	61	59	41
Sri Lanka	11	100	0	3	67	33	3	67	33
Sudan	25	80	20	4	75	25	78	90	10
Suriname	2	100	0						
Swaziland	10	70	30				21	90	10
Sweden	36	50	50	6	67	33	42	52	48
Switzerland	49	76	24	20	75	25	52	67	33
Syrian Arab Republic	9	89	11	7	29	71	15	73	27
Tajikistan							43	100	0
Thailand	72	67	33	9	44	56	25	56	44
The FYR of Macedonia	20	80	20				6	83	17
Timor-Leste	1	100	0				2	100	0
Togo	7	100	0	1	100	0	43	98	2
Tonga	3	100	0				5	60	40
Trinidad and Tobago	6	83	17	3	100	0	5	40	60
Tunisia	29	86	14	21	100	0	54	83	17
Turkey	16	100	0	5	80	20	39	95	5
Turkmenistan									
Tuvalu									
Uganda	13	100	0	2	100	0	18	78	22
Ukraine	35	80	20	2	100	0	54	81	19
United Arab Emirates	14	100	0	12	92	8	31	97	3
United Kingdom	30	94	6	12	67	33	33	76	24
United Republic of Tanzania	32	84	16	6	100	0	50	78	22
United States of America	66	59	41	20	45	55	130	69	31
Uruguay	9	78	22	2	100	0	7	86	14
Uzbekistan	5	100	0	3	67	33	4	100	0
Vanuatu									
Vatican	4	100	0	3	100	0	5	100	0
Venezuela	14	64	36	4	50	50	11	45	55
Vietnam	10	100	0	7	100	0	11	100	0
Yemen	11	100	0	4	100	0	22	95	5
Zambia	13	62	38	13	85	15	20	85	15
Zimbabwe	31	84	16	5	80	20	43	88	12
TOTAL	**3676**			**901**			**4450**		
AVERAGE		**81**	**19**		**77**	**23**		**81**	**19**

Participation in the TFFM and the WGIG

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Michel Chertok, Representative, Global Knowledge Partnership

Jim Crowe, Deputy Director, Foreign Affairs/United Nations and Commonwealth Division, Canada

Ahmed Darwish, Minister of State for Administrative Development, Egypt

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Janis Karklins, President of the WSIS Preparatory Committee for the Tunis Phase

Rik Panganiban, Communications Coordinator, Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) (29 November TF meeting)

Pietro Sicuro, Directeur, INTIF, Gestionnaire du Fonds francophone des inforoutes, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (4 October TF meeting)

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Juan Carlos Solines Moreno, Executive Director, Gobierno Digital, Quito

Mikhail Vladimirovich Yakushev, Director of Legal Support Department, Ministry of Information Technology & Communications, Russian Federation, Moscow

Peter Zangl, Deputy Director-General, Information Society and Media Directorate General, European Commission, Brussels

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WSIS outcome document "commitments"

Geneva Declaration of Principles

A number of articles reaffirm commitments to MDGs, Universal Declaration of Human Rights etc.

10.
We are fully committed to turning this digital divide into a digital opportunity for all, particularly for those who risk being left behind and being further marginalized.

11.
We are committed to realizing our common vision of the Information Society for ourselves and for future generations. ... We are also committed to ensuring that the development of ICT applications and operation of services respects the rights of children as well as their protection and well-being.

12.
We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis on [sic] equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes.

65.
We commit ourselves to strengthening cooperation to seek common responses to the challenges and to the implementation of the Plan of Action, which will realize the vision of an inclusive Information Society based on the Key Principles incorporated in this Declaration.

66.
We further commit ourselves to evaluate and follow-up progress in bridging the digital divide, taking into account different levels of development, so as to reach internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, and to assess the effectiveness of investment and international cooperation efforts in building the Information Society.

Geneva Plan of Action

27.D2
refers to "above commitments" but preceding text contains no use of the word "commit".

Tunis Commitment

Article 7 reaffirms Geneva commitments.

Article 23 reaffirms commitment to gender equity; article 25 to inclusion of young people.

16.
We further commit ourselves to evaluate and follow up progress in bridging the digital divide, taking into account different levels of development, so as to reach internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, and to assess the effectiveness of investment and international cooperation efforts in building the Information Society.

24.
We will strengthen action to protect children from abuse and defend their rights in the context of ICTs.

30.
Recognizing that disaster mitigation can significantly support efforts to bring about sustainable development and help in poverty reduction, **we reaffirm our commitment** to leveraging ICT capabilities and potential through fostering and strengthening cooperation at the national, regional, and international levels.

31.
We commit ourselves to work together towards the implementation of the Digital Solidarity Agenda, as agreed in paragraph 27 of the Geneva Plan of Action.

32.
We further commit ourselves to promote the inclusion of all peoples in the Information Society through the development and use of local and/or indigenous languages in ICTs.

Tunis Agenda

42.
We reaffirm our commitment to the freedom to seek, receive, impart and use information, in particular, for the creation, accumulation and dissemination of knowledge.

43.
We reiterate our commitments to the positive uses of the Internet and other ICTs and to take appropriate actions and preventive measures, as determined by law, against abusive uses of ICTs as mentioned under the *Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society* of the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action.

49.
We reaffirm our commitment to turning the digital divide into digital opportunity, and **we commit** to ensuring harmonious and equitable development for all. **We commit** to foster and provide guidance on development areas in the broader Internet governance arrangements, and to

include, amongst other issues, international interconnection costs, capacity building and technology/know-how transfer.

53.

We commit to working earnestly towards multilingualization of the Internet, as part of a multilateral, transparent and democratic process, involving governments and all stakeholders, in their respective roles.

83.

Building an inclusive development-oriented Information Society will require unremitting multistakeholder effort. **We thus commit ourselves** to remain fully engaged—nationally, regionally and internationally—to ensure sustainable implementation and follow-up of the outcomes and commitments reached during the WSIS process and its Geneva and Tunis phases of the Summit.

90.

We are committed to working towards achieving the indicative targets, set out in the Geneva Plan of Action, that serve as global references for improving connectivity and universal, ubiquitous, equitable, non-discriminatory and affordable access to, and use of, ICTs, considering different national circumstances, to be achieved by 2015, and to using ICTs, as a tool to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, by:

a. *mainstreaming and aligning national e-strategies*, across local, national, and regional action plans, as appropriate and in accordance with local and national development priorities, with in-built time-bound measures.

b. *developing and implementing enabling policies* that reflect national realities and that promote a supportive international environment, foreign direct investment as well as the mobilization of domestic resources, in order to promote and foster entrepreneurship, particularly Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), taking into account the relevant market and cultural contexts. These policies should be reflected in a transparent, equitable regulatory framework to create a competitive environment to support these goals and strengthen economic growth.

c. *building ICT capacity* for all and confidence in the use of ICTs by all - including youth, older persons, women, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and remote and rural communities - through the improvement and delivery of relevant education and training programmes and systems including lifelong and distance learning.

d. *implementing effective training and education,* particularly in ICT science and technology, that motivates and promotes participation and active involvement of girls and women in the decision-making process of building the Information Society.

e. *paying special attention to the formulation of universal design concepts and the use of assistive technologies* that promote access for all persons, including those with disabilities.

f. *promoting public policies aimed at providing affordable access* at all levels, including community-level, to hardware as well as software and connectivity through an increasingly converging technological environment, capacity building and local content.

g. *improving access to the world's health knowledge and telemedicine services*, in particular in areas such as global cooperation in emergency response, access to and networking among health professionals to help improve quality of life and environmental conditions.

h. *building ICT capacities* to improve access and use of postal networks and services.

i. *using ICTs to improve access to agricultural knowledge*, combat poverty, and support production of and access to locally relevant agriculture-related content.

j. *developing and implementing e-government applications* based on open standards in order to enhance the growth and interoperability of e-government systems, at all levels, thereby furthering access to government information and services, and contributing to building ICT networks and developing services that are available anywhere and anytime, to anyone and on any device.

k. *supporting educational, scientific, and cultural institutions*, including libraries, archives and museums, in their role of developing, providing equitable, open and affordable access to, and preserving diverse and varied content, including in digital form, to support informal and formal education, research and innovation; and in particular supporting libraries in their public-service role of providing free and equitable access to information and of improving ICT literacy and community connectivity, particularly in underserved communities.

l. *enhancing the capacity of communities* in all regions to develop content in local and/or indigenous languages.

m. *strengthening the creation of quality e-content*, on national, regional and international levels.

n. *promoting the use of traditional and new media* in order to foster universal access to information, culture and knowledge for all people, especially vulnerable populations and populations in developing countries and using, *inter alia*, radio and television as educational and learning tools.

o. *reaffirming the independence, pluralism and diversity of media, and freedom of information* including through, as appropriate, the development of domestic

legislation, we reiterate our call for the responsible use and treatment of information by the media in accordance with the highest ethical and professional standards. We reaffirm the necessity of reducing international imbalances affecting the media, particularly as regards infrastructure, technical resources and the development of human skills. These reaffirmations are made with reference to Geneva Declaration of Principles paragraphs 55 to 59.

p. *strongly encouraging ICT enterprises and entrepreneurs to develop and use environment-friendly production processes* in order to minimize the negative impacts of the use and manufacture of ICTs and disposal of ICT waste on people and the environment. In this context, it is important to give particular attention to the specific needs of the developing countries.

q. *incorporating regulatory, self-regulatory, and other effective policies and frameworks to protect children and young people* from abuse and exploitation through ICTs into national plans of action and e-strategies.

r. *promoting the development of advanced research networks,* at national, regional and international levels, in order to improve collaboration in science, technology and higher education.

s. *promoting voluntary service,* at the community level, to help maximize the developmental impact of ICTs.

t. *promoting the use of ICTs to enhance flexible ways of working*, including teleworking, leading to greater productivity and job creation.

119.

We commit ourselves to review and follow up progress in bridging the digital divide, taking into account the different levels of development among nations, so as to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, assessing the effectiveness of investment and international cooperation efforts in building the Information Society, identifying gaps as well as deficits in investment and devising strategies to address them.

References

The main WSIS documents are available from the WSIS website, which is maintained by the ITU. The overall URL is www.itu.int/wsis. Different sections of this website provide access to:

- The four WSIS output documents

- The reports of the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms and the Working Group on Internet Governance (on the latter, see also www.wgig.org)

- The proceedings of the two full Summit sessions

- The proceedings of the preparatory process, including the PrepComs and the regional preparatory meetings

- Participant lists in all summit fora

- A variety of other summit-related material.

The site also provides access to materials generated by the follow-up processes to WSIS, including the post-WSIS action lines. The Internet Governance Forum maintains a site at www.intgovforum.org, while the first IGF meeting is also recorded at www.igfgreece2006.gr.

The following list notes the URLs for a number of organisations' work on WSIS, where this has significant bearing on the report above.

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
www.apc.org/english/wsis.

CONGO
www.ngocongo.orgindex.php?what=resources&g=12

Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors
www.iccwbo.org/basis/id8215/index.html.

International Telecommunication Union
www.itu.int/wsis.

United Nations Development Programme
www.undp.org/wsis.

UNESCO
www.unesco.org/wsis.

World Bank
www.worldbank.org/wsis.

The following list draws attention to a number of other reports and documents which are either cited in the text or offer interesting insights into WSIS and/or the issues discussed above. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive list of references to WSIS resources.

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