

A Civil Society Input to the Proceedings of the 10th Session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development

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It is now universally recognised that the information revolution will define the 21st century society. ICTs have permeated all aspects of our lives, setting the scene for far reaching institutional and structural changes. It is therefore imperative that we develop new and improved means of global governance, generally, as well as specifically in the areas which constitute information society (IS) changes more directly.

Science and technology may be the drivers of the changes we are living through, but the real meaning of digital opportunity is contained in the social, economic, political and cultural constituents of these changes, recognised in the CSTD's mandate to promote the "building of a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society." The huge responsibility of being the nodal body for WSIS follow-up and implementation gives the commission a path-breaking role in global governance; *to contribute to developing global governance structures that are adequate to the needs of an emerging global information society. It is important that the commission sees its role and mandate in this broad perspective.*

IT for Change would like to make the following inputs into the proceedings of the 10th session of CSTD.

A. Substantive Agenda and the Work Program of the Commission

1. **In recognition of the specific context and mandate with respect to WSIS follow-up, it is important for the commission to change its work strategies and work program.** Two contextual issues are significant to note. One, that IS issues by their very definition are *society-wide*, and therefore difficult to categorise and delimit so that only some are taken for an intensive examination by the CSTD. Two, the context of the IS is so *fast-changing* that it is difficult to predict what would be the more important issues, say, in 2008. **Both these contexts of governance of IS issues require the commission to be broad in its sweep and flexible in choosing new issues for consideration during the meeting.** The commission should, in this regard, be able to modify its thinking, orientation, role and work methods, even as it bases its IS related mandate on the fundamental principles and the basic objectives which have always underpinned its work.
2. **At the very basic level, the commission should orient itself to the role of an umbrella coordination/ oversight body over the (suitably) complex WSIS follow-up and implementation mechanism.** Fortunately, WSIS follow-up and implementation has a strong line up of international and regional organisations dealing with different aspects of the IS, obviating the need for the CSTD itself to take exclusive responsibility for in-depth examination of any particular issue.
3. **The commission should not be too exclusive in the examination of 1 or 2 issues every year as has been the practice of the commission.** However, it may choose 1-2 issues for *relatively* greater focus every year, but this should be subsidiary to its main role of an umbrella supervisory structure over whole WSIS follow-up and implementation.

4. **It is important that the commission devotes its time to develop the overall principles and to govern its oversight and assessment of the WSIS follow-up and implementation work by various agencies.** While such principles will derive directly from the WSIS documents, it will be useful for the commission to evolve a document of principles that is specifically oriented to the needs of its oversight function and assessment of WSIS follow-up and implementation work. Such a document will enable progressive interpretation of the WSIS principles in the light of new developments, and also provide a format for the various agencies in follow-up and implementation work to assess themselves, as well as report to the commission. **A specific template structure for reporting by various agencies to the CSTD may also be developed by the commission.**
5. **The annual work program of the commission should be divided into three parts: (1) the biggest part should be devoted to receiving reports on WSIS follow-up and implementation from various agencies, as per given formats, adhering to an outline of principles and the proposed template structure, and assessing them as well making recommendations, (2) specific time should be given to new / emerging issues which may become very important to be noted by and acted upon by the commission, and (3) (at a relatively subsidiary level, keeping in view the ‘bandwidth’ requirements for fulfilling the above 2 tasks) 1 or 2 issues may be taken up for deeper consideration every year.** This task can also be an ongoing activity between the annual sessions, involving experts.

B. Working Methods of the Commission

1. Appropriate interface with all agencies:

We are glad to note that a plethora of international, national and local agencies have found for themselves a role in dealing with IS issues. The commission should formally engage with how it can effectively take up the role of a nodal oversight body over this complex multi-stakeholder WSIS follow-up and implementation system. It should concentrate on developing an appropriate interface with all these agencies, at a more formal level than at present. We have mentioned the need for a document of principles, and a template structure, on the basis of which these agencies should report to the commission, and for the commission to make necessary recommendations back to these agencies, as well as to the ECOSOC.

2. Use of digital platforms to democratise governance:

As an important node in global governance of the IS, the commission is best placed to innovate and promote new forms and methods in governance using digital opportunities. In regard of managing the complex institutional network, as well as to promote wider participation, outreach and transparency, it is important that the commission makes the best use of digital/electronic platforms (something which has been noted in the ECOSOC resolution 2006/46). This requires not only technical expertise, which may be as accessible directly to the commission but, much more importantly, it requires expertise regarding organisational innovation in the context of the use of new technologies.

3. Research and Analysis during the Inter-sessional Period:

The commission should also take up extensive inter-sessional work, in keeping with its huge mandate and responsibilities. This should include research and analysis of important issues, including through external consultants. In doing so, since the basic mandate of the commission is development-oriented, experts from developing countries should be given due preference. Using digital platforms effectively will also help in such on-going work. Also a greater number of face-to-face inter-sessional meetings need to be arranged.

C. Civil Society's participation in the Commission

The Tunis agenda spoke about “strengthening of the Commission, taking into account the multi-stakeholder approach’ (para 105). This cannot be interpreted to mean anything other than the consideration of some non-governmental membership of the commission. We are disappointed to note that the expansion of the commission has taken place without the induction of any civil society representative. Representation from civil society on the commission would have given the commission an added global character beyond that constituted by merely coming together of country governments. This nature of the information society was recognised in the multistakeholder approach taken by the WSIS. *We think that not considering civil society membership of the CSTD was a missed opportunity, especially with regard to the mandate of paragraph 105 of the Tunis Agenda.* Civil society, while cooperating with the current structure and working of the commission reserves its right to keep insisting on the inclusion of s civil society members into the commission.

In respect of specific aspects of civil society participation, in the commission's working we endorse the recommendations made by CONGO (Conference of NGOs) dated 20th of May to the CSTD's 10th Session.

D. Two Specific Issues requiring Immediate Consideration

It is important that the commission's role is seen in terms of a complete ‘system-wide follow up’ (Tunis Agenda) and there is no move to remove any of the WSIS issues from its coordination/ oversight role. Some actors seem to have the impression that the CSTD should limit itself to the follow up of action line elements alone. The Tunis Agenda, in the parts dealing with follow-up mechanisms, mentions WSIS ‘themes’ at the same level as ‘action lines’. **‘Financial mechanisms for ICTD’ and ‘Internet Governance’ were the main themes for WSIS, and they cannot have a secondary position to the ‘action lines’ mentioned in the Tunis agenda, in the commission's work.**

In the context of the above, the CSTD may request UNDP, in view of its central role in terms of the financial mechanisms theme of WSIS, to give an annual report on the issue of ‘financial mechanism for ICTD’. We are happy to see that the Internet Governance Forum has provided a report of its activities to the CSTD, and this should be discussed by the commission. On another line of **Internet Governance follow-up activity, in terms of the ‘enhanced cooperation’ on and for global Internet policies, we note with concern that no activity has been taken up in this area,** though the timeline for beginning such activity is given clearly in the Tunis agenda as the first quarter of 2006. We will like this annual session of CSTD to discuss this issue, and to request a report on it from the UN Secretary General.