General Assembly's overall review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes

Official Form for Written Submissions

A. Your Information

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Stakeholder Type[1]: Civil Society

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B. Formal Input

Some guiding questions for your submissions are listed below:

1. To what extent has progress been made on the vision of the people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society in the ten years since the WSIS?

During the last ten years initial steps have been taken towards a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society. WSIS has played a role in this progress, thanks to the input of varied stakeholder groups, and we have seen a resulting recognition of the importance of inclusive, multistakeholder, approaches to ICT for Development and Internet Governance. While we still feel more can be done to address human rights issues in a WSIS context, we hope that progress made can continue, and also be acknowledged in other fora such as the United Nations post-2015 Development Agenda.

Over the past ten years, libraries have been actively involved in all levels of WSIS and worked hard and to highlight the essential role they play in utilizing ICT for development. IFLA has been representing librarians and information professionals within WSIS to ensure recognition for the importance of public access to ICTs, access to and preservation of, digital information and digital cultural heritage, promotion of local content, as well as providing people with Media and Information Literacy skills to support development and further inclusive societies.

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[1] When specifying your stakeholder type, please indicate one of the following: Government, Civil Society, Private Sector, Academia, and Technical Sector.

Yet we believe further progress needs to be made to connect the ICT and development communities and ensure their participation in WSIS. The first ten years of WSIS have been a start but IFLA, as an international NGO working in Geneva on WSIS and New York on Post-2015, can testify that the development NGOs working on post-2015 have little to no knowledge of WSIS and the role it could play in supporting the new global development framework. Likewise, we have felt that over the past 18 months the WSIS community has been slow to understand what is going on in New York. Despite the progress of WSIS, this has to be seen as a missed opportunity and does detract somewhat from the overall impact of WSIS-related activities. It seems inconceivable that WSIS has hardly been mentioned at all in plenary in New York during either the Open Working Group meetings in 2014, or the Inter-Governmental Negotiations in 2015 – yet that is our experience.

In relation to this, there are still opportunities for progress with the involvement of both communities. In 2014 IFLA launched The Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development, which has now been signed by over 560 organisations from across the library, development and technology communities. The Declaration clearly states the role ICTs play in development and asks UN Member States to not only recognise this in the post-2015 development framework but also actively work on implementing policies to further ICTs and public access to information in order to build inclusive societies. Support for the Declaration shows that there is an appetite amongst all stakeholders to see more emphasis on ICTD in the coming years, something WSIS should be well-placed to pick up on.

2. What are the challenges to the implementation of WSIS outcomes?

A strong alignment and recognition of the WSIS action lines and its respective outlines should be incorporated by the United Nations post-2015 Development Agenda. Yet in some regards, this massive parallel process to WSIS poses a challenge to the implementation of the WSIS outcomes, in that it could come to be seen by Member States as the 'only game in town' – we can now see the post-2015 process begin to outline what a technology transfer and facilitation mechanism looks like, and there is a danger of duplicating activities that have been the preserve of WSIS or the IGF in recent years. If MS choose to focus energies on the ICT components of post-2015 over implementing WSIS outcomes, this could negatively impact WSIS in general.

This would be a shame as many WSIS Action Lines, particularly C3, Access to Information, are essential for the successful implementation of the new Development Agenda. The recent WSIS-SDG Matrix Document produced by the ITU is an excellent example of how the two processes map to each other. The challenge will be to get New York to recognize the value of the work being done in Geneva, and successfully integrate WSIS into post-2015, while maintaining enough space for WSIS activities to continue and flourish outside of the post-2015 conversation (in areas such as Internet Governance, for example).

In terms of other challenges, we have been pleased that WSIS has been able to actively engage civil society and NGOs in its process over the last ten years. However, this engagement has to be sustained and increased going forward - civil society and NGOs are essential partners in realising outcomes of WSIS and other UN agency processes.

3. What should be the priorities in seeking to achieve WSIS outcomes and progress towards the Information Society, taking into account emerging trends?

IFLA is keen to see WSIS continue to consider emerging technology and societal trends as priorities are identified to achieve outcomes and progress. IFLA investigated emerging trends relevant to the information society in its 2013 Trend Report [trends.ifla.org]. This clearly showed a strong technological shift in society within the immediate future and the need for ICT to ensure that 'no-one will be left behind'. To do this, a broader conception of access needs to be accepted within WSIS, with a focus on "Real Access" or the approach taken by the Beyond Access (www.beyondaccess.net) project. Digital divides within and between countries need to be addressed, and a real access approach can help with this. Skills and training are essential to complement increased broadband access in the hand, the home, or through public access.

A further priority must also be to place greater emphasis on the preservation of our digital information environment. As UNESCO has recognized in the past, digital preservation of cultural heritage, and continuing access to born-digital materials are major issues that must be addressed as we move through a period in the Internet's history where file-formats and data storage continuously cycle through platform migrations, improvements and obsolescence. From IFLA's perspective there must be more consideration given to phenomenon such bit-rot, or the short lifecycles of files. As we have stated many times in our engagement at WIPO regarding the need to update copyright legislation for the digital age, we run the risk of creating a digital black hole of 20th and 21st century culture if we do not act in the area. We would urge that long-term access and preservation to digital information be considered a priority for WSIS going forward.

Finally, IFLA again stresses the importance of a strong alignment between WSIS outcomes and the post-2015 Development Agenda as well the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to implementation on a national level - in particular in national development plans with an ICTD aspect.

It should be a priority to direct WSIS activities to help and enable the Post-2015 Means of Implementation as well as realising the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and its 169 targets. Furthermore the WSIS mandate bears direct relevance to the outcomes of the Financing for Development 3 meetings, in particular the Technology Facilitation Mechanism which is being created. It should be a priority to ensure that the next stage of WSIS complements these other processes, and avoid reinventing the wheel.

4. What are general expectations from the WSIS + 10 High Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly?

IFLA expects the meeting to re-affirm the WSIS vision, and to clearly recognise the valuable and essential role WSIS, its outcomes, and all its stakeholders can play in enabling the post-2015 Development Agenda. It would be a waste of resources and engagement to not harness the WSIS outcomes for the new Development Agenda.

Furthermore, IFLA would like to see a clear statement of the importance that public access to ICTs plays in developing inclusive information societies. This is one of the strong outcomes of WSIS and should not be disregarded. Likewise, we want to see the meeting show a strong vision for an information society that provides sustainable access to digital information by acknowledging the importance of digital preservation to guarantee future generations access to digital cultural heritage and born-digital materials. Language for these issues can be found in the **WSIS+10 Statement on the Implementation of the WSIS Outcomes,** which invites the UN system organisations, UN Member States and all stakeholders to recognise:

- 7. That greater efforts are still required to improve affordable access to ICTs, information and knowledge for all people, in particular in the developing countries and Least Developed Countries. (LCDs) There is also a need to ensure equity of access, including public access, in terms of human capacities and access to current and new ICTs, between urban and rural communities within countries and between countries around the world.
- 9. The need to promote access for all to public information and knowledge, including open access to scientific information, particularly in developing and least developed countries and among marginalised communities in all countries.
- 27. The need for people to have media and information literacy skills that are indispensable in order to fully participate in an inclusive Information Society.

And also the **WSIS+10 Vision for WSIS Beyond 2015**, which invites the UN system organisations, UN Member States and all stakeholders to envision a world where:

- 6. Digital inclusion remains a cross-cutting priority, going beyond affordability and access to ICT networks, services and applications, including in rural and remote areas. The digital, technology and knowledge divides will be bridged to reap the benefits of ICT and broadband in transforming the lives of communities.

- 8. There is full respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, and for everyone's right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work and local content in the language of their choice. The preservation of digital heritage in the information society is ensured

And the same document, which sets out priority topics such as:

- 12. Encouraging governments and intergovernmental organizations as well as private institutions and organisations to pursue policies and programs that advocate for and promote media and information literacy (MIL) and lifelong learning for all, so as to help users develop their abilities to evaluate and interact with online information resources.
- 16. Ensuring the preservation of digital heritage in the information society by putting into place cohesive, conceptual and practical digital strategies, supported, to the extent practicable, at international level, for the preservation of and access to recorded information in the digital environment in all its forms while respecting individual privacy.
- 22. Supporting providers of public access in the local communities such as libraries to help people access information resources they need and develop information literacy skills to improve their lives.

Going forward, IFLA expects a renewal of the IGF mandate, and a stronger IGF. IFLA recognises the positive development of the IGF over the last ten years and further stresses the importance of the national, regional and international IGFs and their continuation. We continue to see a need to discuss Internet governance at these levels, and believe that the IGF offers a helpful venue for information professionals from across IFLA's network to get engaged.

IFLA furthermore would like to see an additional strengthening of CSO involvement from the global south in both WSIS and the IGF.

5. What shape should the outcome document take?

At this time IFLA is not able to speak precisely to the form of the outcome document. However, we would like to see something that reinforces and complements the post-2015 development framework, and is simple and easy to understand for IFLA members who do not follow UN resolutions and outcomes closely. We feel that there is potential to get the world's c.650,000 information professionals more interested and engaged in WSIS-related issues, but only if the WSIS+10 outcome document speaks to them in language they can understand. We look forward to continuing to engage on the shape of the outcome document as the review progresses.