



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

12 August 2015

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to transmit herewith a Summary of the key messages and proposals from the Informal Interactive Stakeholders Consultation on the Overall Review by the General Assembly of the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, which I convened on 2 July 2015 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam K. Kutesa', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sam K. Kutesa

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

**Informal Interactive Stakeholders Consultation on the Overall Review by the General
Assembly of the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the
Information Society**

UN Headquarters, New York

2 July 2015

President's Summary

Introduction

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/302, the President of the General Assembly convened an informal interactive consultation with all relevant stakeholders of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) on 2 July 2015. The purpose of this consultation was to collect inputs from all relevant stakeholders of the WSIS for the intergovernmental negotiation process that will result in an inter-governmentally agreed outcome document for adoption at a High-level meeting of the General Assembly scheduled for 15-16 December 2015.

The consultation comprised an opening and a closing segment, as well as three panel discussions which focused on progress made in the implementation of WSIS outcomes, ICT gaps, areas for continued focus and challenges including the digital divide, and harnessing ICTs for development. The following is a summary of the key messages and proposals from the consultation.

Opening Segment

Speakers highlighted the substantial progress made in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes over the last decade and the important role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in promoting development.

It was stressed that challenges still remain such as bridging the digital divides between and within countries, including the gender digital divide and the special needs of vulnerable groups, as well as using ICTs to catalyse broad-based growth.

It was emphasized that there is a need to strengthen linkages between the WSIS process and the post-2015 development agenda so as to further unleash the potential of ICTs as an enabling tool for the achievement of sustainable development.

Speakers noted that stakeholders have played an important role in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes and urged them to continue to support the achievement of the WSIS vision, especially in countries with special needs.

Stakeholders were briefed on the discussions of the Initial Stocktaking Session for the review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes held on 1 July 2015 and were encouraged to provide inputs to the WSIS review process in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/302.

Progress made in the implementation of WSIS outcomes

Speakers commended the progress made in the development of the Information Society since WSIS, and highlighted the rapid development of ICTs over the last decade and the increasingly important contribution of ICTs to economic and social development, as well as governance.

It was underscored that significant progress has been made towards achieving the WSIS goals, particularly in terms of connectivity and access to basic ICTs. New developments of ICTs including broadband networks, cloud computing, big data and social media have changed the paradigm for the implementation of WSIS outcomes.

Many speakers stressed the value of the multi-stakeholder approach established by WSIS, and recommended that the preparatory process for the General Assembly should be as inclusive as possible in order to take advantage of the benefits of collaboration.

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was cited as a good example of multi-stakeholder collaboration and a renewal of its mandate was broadly supported.

ICT gaps, areas for continued focus and challenges including the digital divide

Participants emphasized that digital divide between and within countries is one of the biggest challenges in implementing the WSIS vision. Developing countries, especially least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing states (SIDs) and African countries, face challenges of ICT accessibility and affordability. Furthermore, it was noted that the broadband gap between developed and developing countries is growing which is likely to widen other development divides between them.

It was stressed that within countries, the digital divide exists in many ways such as by gender, age, income and vulnerability. Many speakers expressed concerns about the imbalances between women's and men's access to and participation in ICTs and called for special attention to be paid to ICT access for young people and marginalized groups, including the poor, people with disabilities as well as indigenous peoples.

It was underscored that lack of an enabling environment for ICT investment and innovation, inadequate financing, lack of technology, lack of awareness of the value of information, digital illiteracy, and lack of relevant content are among the main factors contributing to digital divide.

It was stressed that the rapid development of ICT technology including social media, big data, cloud computing, the Internet of Things gives rise to new challenges, including net neutrality, the so-called "dark Net", data ownership, privacy, exercise of human rights online, surveillance and cybersecurity and peace in cyberspace. One speaker also suggested that attention needs to be paid to artificial intelligence which might "disrupt" technology and established economic models.

Many speakers expressed concerns about cyber security and unethical use of the Internet, including the spread of hate speech and extremism. It was noted that developing countries are the most vulnerable in this regard as they lack technology and capacity to protect themselves from such threats.

It was noted that the lack of indicators to measure the achievement of WSIS targets is a missing link in the implementation of WSIS outcomes.

Harnessing ICT for development

Participants stressed that ICT for development is at the core of WSIS. To further unleash potentials of ICT for development, it is critical to achieve greater integration between WSIS and the post-2015 development agenda, and make ICT a crosscutting tool for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this regard, collaboration amongst all relevant stakeholders including government, international organizations, private sector, civil society and local communities is essential.

It was noted that it is important to understand the needs of developing countries in ICT development and relate development approaches to the unique contexts of individual countries. Developing countries' efforts to improve capacity building for ICT development should be supported by North-South cooperation supplemented by South-South and Triangular cooperation. Their needs in ICT development should be taken into consideration by the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, scheduled for July 13-16 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

It was pointed out that while emerging technologies such as cloud computing and Internet of Things can be applied for economic and societal benefits, the successful implementation of such technologies needs to be supported by a facilitating policy environment, necessary infrastructure, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Participants emphasized that an enabling policy environment is essential for the development of ICTs. In this regard, it is critical that governments formulate policies to foster investment and innovation in their national contexts. It was suggested that governments establish a broad framework for the strategic development of ICTs, which offers the stability and predictability required by businesses and, at the same, time allows flexibility for stakeholders to develop innovative solutions in response to rapid changes of ICTs. It was stressed that developing innovative solutions that can empower businesses, civil society and individuals should be supported. In this regard, access to universal, affordable broadband, local content and services, as well as capacity-building were highlighted as critical factors.

The importance of providing ICT training for all segments of population including youth, women and persons with disabilities was highlighted. ICT education including the use of internet should be made the basis of learning in the 21st century, and efforts should be made to improve global education governance towards this end. The special needs of women and persons with disabilities in using ICTs should be addressed.

It was noted that in many contexts, liberalization of the industry to allow competition is crucial to improving affordability. Local content is critical for improving access to information. In this regard, policy makers and regulators should understand local contexts and avoid importing inappropriate techniques from dissimilar contexts. Respect for cultural diversity and multilingualism are essential.

It was suggested that normative indicators should be created to measure progress in the development of information society. They could include access and participation in ICTs by all segments of population including women, youth, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples; observing corporate social responsibility; interconnection costs; technology transfer and capacity building, among others.

Speakers stressed the importance of ensuring an open and secure Internet, and called for strengthened efforts to address cyber security threats and unethical use of ICTs. It was emphasized that human rights, including privacy and freedom of expression, should be protected and a renewed commitment should be made to the rights of women, including digital equality and protection against violence.

There were calls for strengthened internet governance through multi-stakeholder collaboration. There is a need to better define the nature of internet governance and identify the evolving aspects of ICTs that affect relevant public policy issues, as well as agree on a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders.

Conclusion

The WSIS10 Informal Interactive Stakeholder Consultation provided an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss and share views on many issues including the digital divide, multi-stakeholder participation, role of IGF, ICTs as enabling tools for socio-economic growth, and the importance of maintaining a stable, open and secure internet. It also underscored the importance of linking the WSIS review to the SDGs.