

Summary UNCTAD's Open Forum at IGF 2014
Reported by CSTD Secretariat

5 September 2014

The open forum hosted by UNCTAD was the third in a series of events organised to collect inputs for the ten-year review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes conducted by the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD). The objective of the session was to share information about the review and to collect the experiences, views, and priorities of IGF participants concerning the implementation of WSIS outcomes over the last ten years, with special emphasis on Internet governance issues.

In her opening remarks, Excellency Ms Omobola Johnson, Minister of Communication Technologies of Nigeria and Chairperson of the eighteenth session of the CSTD briefly remarked upon the important advances in the development of Internet in the wider world as well as in Nigeria. She especially highlighted the striking growth that we have witnessed in the number of people with access to the Internet. Whereas only one billion people had access to the Internet during the WSIS process, this number has reached three billion. Important developments have also occurred in the improvement and effectiveness of Internet services: for instance, Nigeria is now one of the most important e-commerce markets in the world. She also stressed that it is vital to consider that we still face important challenges in terms of ICT development.

Minister Johnson introduced the context of the CSTD review and presented the current status of this initiative. She stressed that this review will allow us not only to evaluate what has been achieved in terms of WSIS outcomes but will also help us focus on how to move forward and formulate further solutions for the creation of a fully-realised Information Society. It is therefore important that we gather as many inputs as possible.

Ms Mervi Kultamaa introduced the mandate of the CSTD and the follow-up of the implementation of WSIS outcomes. She explained that the mandate given to the CSTD by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) asks it to encourage the sharing of best practices, foster dialogue, and facilitate the further implementation of WSIS outcomes. She further explained the work of the Commission on the ten-year review of WSIS outcomes. This includes a collection of inputs from all stakeholders both in writing and through face-face consultation meetings to reach out to all corners of the world.

Dr David Souter set out the WSIS outcomes, addressed some of the changes taking place in ICT technology, services and markets, and described the four core questions of the review to be answered during the open forum. These questions are aimed at providing a space for all stakeholders to submit their own considerations of the key issues to the CSTD. Dr Souter stressed the importance of considering the changes in the ICT landscape and its context when reviewing the WSIS outcomes.

During the open forum, the discussion centred on two main issues: first, procedural matters of the review and, second, substantive comments regarding the implementation of WSIS outcomes. In relation to procedural matters, panellists answered questions regarding the participation in the review of organizations, UN agencies and governments, and the potential for these to provide inputs. Participants were also informed that the Commission will consider the assessment report of the WSIS outcomes prepared by the CSTD Secretariat in November 2014 in Geneva. It will agree the final content of its review in its forthcoming annual session next May 2015.

The discussion addressed whether a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society has been achieved. In the discussion, it was suggested that this has been achieved in two ways, through value added by people themselves and by governments through e-government and services. The investment in infrastructure made by government over the years since WSIS is reaping benefits. There was also discussion of the relevance of qualitative and quantitative data to the assessment of the implementation of WSIS outcomes. Past efforts in measurement have concentrated

on measuring the progress of governments. Future objectives should focus on citizen-centred initiatives and business sector.

Participants also raised points about the significant growth in access to broadband in Africa and Latin America in recent years. This has facilitated greater interconnections between, as well as within, countries in these regions. It was considered important for the review to keep track of this growth, and to ensure that it continues to reflect the current landscape of ICT development. The review should also consider the diverse challenges faced by countries in terms of development of ICT, and allow for the interdependence of ICT development and related challenges.

Contributions were also made concerning poverty as a factor that hinders Internet access in some countries and regions and therefore limits the development of the Internet Society. Other issues identified included challenges to providing and facilitating Internet access, notably lack of adequate power infrastructure. There are places that do not have the electrical capacity required to store data locally. This could affect data security issues in developing countries. Internet access problems are even more important if access to electricity is limited.

In conclusion, the open forum gave the CSTD Secretariat the opportunity to share and clarify information of its review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes, and offered participants the opportunity to share their views, experiences and opinions regarding this topic. Since written contributions to the review will be received until 15 September 2014, follow-up to this open forum is encouraged through participation in the online questionnaire (<http://unctad.org/en/Pages/CSTD/WSIS-10yearReview.aspx>).