UNESCO

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

world summit
on the **information society**
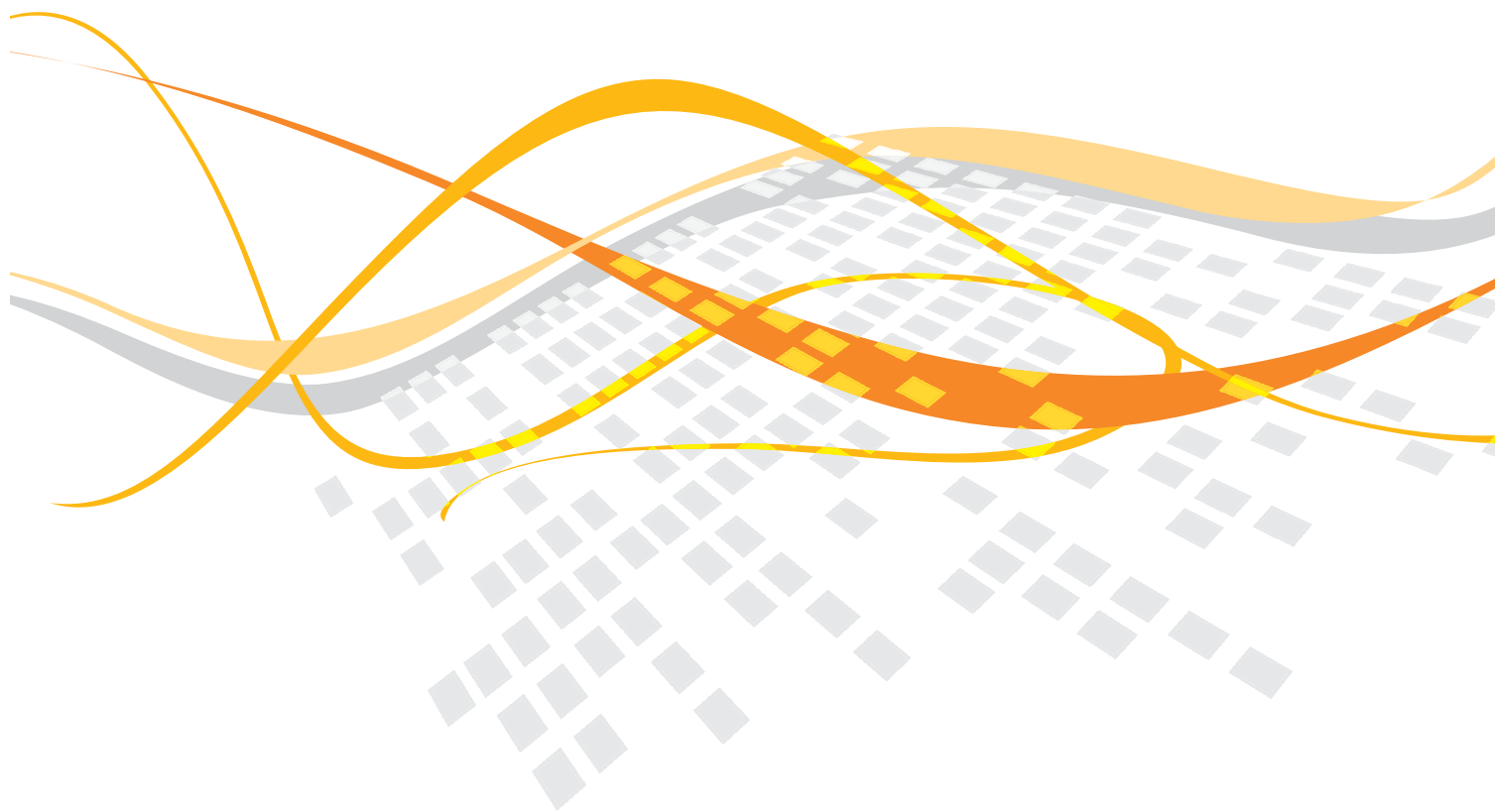Geneva 2003 - Tunis 2005

Fostering Information and Communication for Development

UNESCO's follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society

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This brochure is a short introduction to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and its follow-up.

The brochure contains two parts, presenting different aspects and outcomes of WSIS:

The first part sets out the WSIS framework tracing main events. It describes the role UNESCO plays in the follow-up to translate the WSIS vision into action.

The second part reports about the Geneva Plan of Action and UNESCO's contribution to its implementation. The impact of WSIS is also illustrated with several case stories.

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Part 1

WSIS: A vision of a future information society

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was a UN Summit on the global benefits and challenges of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The main purpose of the Summit and its follow-up is to encourage worldwide collaboration and dialogue in order "to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge"[1].

1   Geneva Declaration of Principles, para 1

Main events, 2003-2009

world summit on the information society
Geneva 2003 - Tunis 2005

2003	**WSIS Geneva. Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action**
2005	**WSIS Tunis. Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society**
2006	**First Cluster of WSIS-related events, Geneva**
	UNESCO designated as a lead agency in the WSIS follow-up and as a lead facilitator for the implementation of six of the WSIS Action Lines
	First Internet Governance Forum (IGF), Athens
2007	**Second Cluster of WSIS-related events, Geneva**
	Second IGF, Rio de Janeiro
2008	**Third Cluster of WSIS-related events, Geneva**
	Third IGF, Hyderabad
2009	**Fourth Cluster of WSIS related events, now called: WSIS Forum 2009**
	Launch of open source-based online WSIScommunity.org platform
	Report by the Director-General on the WSIS follow-up and implementation to the 35th session of the General Conference, Paris
	Open Consultation on Financial Mechanism and United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) meetings, Geneva
	Fourth IGF, Sharm el-Sheikh

The WSIS was held in two phases: in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005. Out of these two meetings came the Geneva Declaration of Principles describing the visions and commitments of the Summit, the Geneva Plan of Action setting out goals to be achieved, and the Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda, which includes the creation of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the request for implementing Financial Mechanisms.

Representatives from governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector took part in the Summit. With this multi-stakeholder approach, an innovative and unprecedented model for cooperation in the UN system, the Summit became a truly people-centered and inclusive process.

The multi-stakeholder process – a new model for cooperation

The multi-stakeholder process brings together all major stakeholders on a particular issue, in a new approach to communication and decision-making.

The process is based on the importance of achieving equity and accountability in communication between stakeholders, involves equitable representation of the various stakeholder groups and gives voices to their views.

This approach is thus based on democratic principles of transparency and participation, and aims to develop partnerships and strengthened networks between stakeholders.

Many consider the Summit as just a chapter in the development of a common vision of a future society. The chapter on the implementation of that vision, however, is much bigger – and is still being written.

For UNESCO the Geneva Plan of Action has a great potential to contribute to realizing internationally agreed development goals and it is therefore informing its daily work.

UNESCO and WSIS

The WSIS main topics and concerns are at the core of UNESCO's work, incorporating the ethical, legal and sociocultural aspects of the information society, ensuring the centrality of the human dimension in the often technology driven fields.

Whereas statistics show that the digital and technological gap is diminishing, the knowledge gap remains still important. As Koïchiro Matsuura, UNESCO's Director-General said in Tunis (in November 2005) "…UNESCO has advocated a shift from "information" to "knowledge" as the key dimension of emerging forms of society… For UNESCO, building knowledge societies is about building a better future for all nations and peoples".

Therefore, UNESCO has put forward the concept of Knowledge Societies, emphasizing four key principles: Freedom of expression, quality education for all, universal access to information and knowledge and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

UNESCO's involvement in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes is threefold:

➤ **UNESCO**, together with the International Telecommunication Union (**ITU**), the United Nations Development Programme (**UNDP**) and

since 2009 also with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (**UNCTAD**), is engaged in shaping the **overall multi-stakeholder coordination of the implementation of all Action Lines**. To fulfill this task, UNESCO has co-organized multi-stakeholder follow-up events since 2006. These annual events provide the opportunity for the participants to share information, to learn about the latest developments, to network and to form partnerships.

➤ **UNESCO facilitates the appropriate implementation of key chapters of the Geneva Plan of Action.** UNESCO facilitates the multi-stakeholder implementation of six of the so-called Action Lines (see p.15) in its areas of competence. This includes elaborating working methods and basic tools as well as facilitating networking, information exchange, sharing of experiences and, not least, identification of synergies among stakeholders.

➤ **UNESCO implements concrete activities included in the Geneva Plan of Action within the framework of its regular programme and extra-budgetary activities.** Many of the goals to be achieved in the Geneva Plan of Action are embedded in UNESCO's strategies and programmes. Highlights of UNESCO's achievements in this regard are described in the second part of this brochure.

UNESCO and WSIS

UNESCO´s unique contribution to WSIS is to emphasize the importance of the human dimension of the Information Society beyond connectivity and infrastructures. UNESCO has been stressing the importance of freedom of expression, education and skills of users, multi-lingualism and advocating multi-stakeholder approaches throughout the entire process.

UNESCO´s role in the follow-up of WSIS is threefold:

- **An implementer of the Geneva Plan of Action**
- **A facilitator of the implementation of six WSIS Action Lines in its area of competence**
- **A coordinator of WSIS activities together with other United Nations agencies**

Part 2

From vision to action

The WSIS participants established a common vision of the information society and provided a framework to translate that vision into action. Whereas the Declaration of Principles sets the vision and framework, the Plan of Action leads the implementation of concrete activities.

The Plan of Action contains 11 Action Lines, that translated the general, global, transversal issue into key topics to be addressed in the building of the information society or for many, of knowledge societies.

In other words, the Action Lines are common main areas to serve as an easy, reference in the execution of concrete actions.

Since the second part of the Summit in 2005, annual multi-stakeholder meetings have been organized by ITU and UNESCO as an important part of the follow-up process. UNESCO has been acting both as a facilitator of the multistakeholder meetings on 6 of the 11 Action Lines and also as an implementer of the WSIS Plan of Action.

To measure the impact of the actions taken and the progress towards the WSIS goals, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) has contributed to the development of internationally comparable indicators, within the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. UIS took the lead on measuring progress of countries toward the integration of information technology in education across the world and the indicators are now being tested by a working group including more than 25 committed countries.

The following is a description of the action taken by UNESCO and stakeholders to implement the Plan of Action. Some of the activities mentioned are crosscutting the clustering of Action Line-issues, thus showing their interconnectedness. The themes are closely interlinked – and so is the action taken.

Action Lines

- **The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of information and communication technologies for development (C1)[2]**

- **Information and communicative infrastructure (C2)**

- **Access to information and knowledge (C3)**

- **Capacity building (C4)**

- **Building confidence and security in the use of information and communication technologies (C5)**

- **Enabling environment (C6)**

- **ICT Applications (C7)**

    - **E-government**

    - **E-business**

    - **E-learning**

    - **E-health**

    - **E-employment**

    - **E-environment**

    - **E-agriculture**

- **E-science**

- **Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content (C8)**

- **Media (C9)**

- **Ethical dimensions of the Information Society (C10)**

- **International and regional cooperation (C11)**

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2   C1 for Chapter One of the Plan of Action, C2 for Chapter Two etc.

Access to information and knowledge (C3)

What does the Plan of Action say?

Information and communication technologies allow people, anywhere in the world, to access information and knowledge almost instantaneously. Equitable access to information and knowledge is fundamental for building knowledge societies and, therefore, all individuals, organizations and communities should benefit from access to these.

To implement this, national policy guidelines are necessary. Furthermore, actions to support universal access to information and knowledge should be undertaken, focusing on:

a. information literacy through capacity building;
b. information preservation to safeguard original material;
c. information accessibility through open and free access.

What has been achieved?

Achievements of UNESCO and stakeholders include:

➤ Assistance to Member States in **developing national policy frameworks**, i.e. Policy Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Governmental Public Domain Information;

➤ **Memory of the World Programme** for the protection of analogue and digital documentary heritage. As the world's documentary heritage belongs to all, it should be protected and made accessible to everyone;

➤ **World Digital Library**, launched in April 2009, makes available on the Internet, free of charge and in multilingual format, significant primary materials from cultures around the world: manuscripts, maps, rare books, musical scores, recordings, films, prints, photographs, architectural drawings, and other significant materials;

➤ **Community Multimedia Centres Programme** promotes community empowerment and addresses the digital and knowledge divides by combining community broadcasting with the Internet and related technologies. There are 130 community media centers in 36 countries;

➤ **A conceptual framework for Information Literacy indicators** published in English and French (2008) is being operationalized by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics through the development of Information Literacy skills testing modules;

➤ **Training programmes** for information professionals i.e. on information literacy for teachers in Ghana, for librarians and archivists in Asia and the Pacific or training-the-trainers workshops in different locations;

➤ **Portals** providing access to information (www.unesco.org/webworld) and data on various scientific topics, e.g. the African Ocean Portal (www.africanoceans.net).

iSt.Lab, a mobile Community Multimedia Centre in the Caribbean

This is the story of a very peculiar Community Multimedia Centre (CMC): the first mobile CMC in the Caribbean. iSt.Lab – High Street Laboratory – is a mini high-tech mobile unit in a wheeled garbage bin containing among other things laptop computers, radio transmitter, electronic community newspaper and wireless Internet access. The unit was created to move across Jamaica and serve as a basis to deliver creative multimedia workshops to people who have never used a computer, as well as to those who want to increase their skills.

UNESCO's vision for the project is to replicate the mobile CMC to transform street corners of Jamaica into learning spaces; community empowerment through creativity is aimed at the many disadvantaged young people met on the streets.

Creating Community Multimedia Centres in the poorest communities of the developing world and in countries in transition is a gateway to active membership in the knowledge societies across the globe. Following the WSIS, UNESCO launched 130 CMCs in 36 countries.

The Centres provide multiple opportunities for information, education and entertainment – and they empower communities by giving public voice to the voiceless.

(Ref.: Geneva Plan of Action, 6 a) "… to connect villages with ICTs and establish community access points", also 9c, 10 d) "Governments, and other stakeholders, should establish sustainable multipurpose community public access points, providing affordable or free-of-charge access for their citizens to the various communication resources, notably the Internet."

Information and Communication Technologies Applications (C7)

Information and communication technologies support sustainable development in many fields. UNESCO's actions for implementation in this area are focused on **e-science** and **e-learning.**

E-science (C7)

What does the Plan of Action say?

The issues embrace both access to scientific knowledge and the dissemination of it:

➤ High-speed Internet connections for all universities and research institutions;

➤ Initiatives to make scientific information affordable and accessible, i.e. open access initiatives and electronic publishing;

➤ Supporting of networking and partnerships;

➤ Promotion of long-term systematic collection, dissemination and preservation of digital data.

What has been achieved?

The main achievements of UNESCO and stakeholders include:

➤ **Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems**, EOLSS, the world's largest knowledge base on sustainable development. As for accessibility, the encyclopedia is made available free of charge to universities in the UN list of least developed countries and disadvantaged individuals worldwide;

➤ **International Year of the Planet Earth**, 2007-2009. The purpose is to show how important earth sciences are for society by supporting research projects focusing on earth sciences;

➤ **Portals** providing access to information and data on various scientific topics, i.e. African Ocean Portal providing presenting information and data on all aspects of ocean and coastal research and management (www.africanoceans.net).

E-learning (C7)

What does the Plan of Action say?

Acquiring knowledge and skills through the use of information and communication technologies is very important in emerging knowledge societies.

Everyone should have the necessary skills to benefit fully from the information society, and e-learning must be supported as a key factor to this.

What has been achieved?

UNESCO supports e-learning initiatives in all regions of the world. Some highlights of UNESCO achievements include:

➤ ICT in Education policy development necessitated the training of 400 policymakers in 28 countries and the www.ictinedtoolkit.org development;

➤ Capacity development of directors, technical and pedagogical experts in order to offer e-learning opportunities, i.e. through the African Virtual Campus for science teachers;

➤ Open Training Platform, an online knowledge hub with 3500 resources for trainers, teachers and learners;

➤ Handbooks and guidelines have been produced for planning effective distance learning programmes;

➤ Competency Framework for Teachers providing guidelines for enhancing teaching and learning with technologies;

➤ Indicators to monitor trends in the use of ICT in Education were developed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics under the auspices of the Partnership for measuring ICT for Development and are being tested in 25 countries.

One Computer in Multi-grade Classroom at Buan Elementary School, Philippines

ICTs are important educational tools to prepare students for the learning and working environments of the 21st century. However, insufficient ICT infrastructure combined with the lack of curriculum relevant content, plus the ICT illiteracy of many school teachers and school heads and the traditional examination systems slow down the pace of ICT integration into the school systems in many countries.

The One Computer in Multi-grade Classroom project shows that it is possible to accomplish great things with limited resources. The project targeted grades 5 and 6 – 11 to 12 year old students – in the remote Buan Elementary School in Davao del Norte.

The classroom was equipped with one computer loaded with software programmes and a video card connected to a TV set. The equipment was placed in a separate area of the classroom, enabling paired students to work on their computer assignments while the other students continued their regular classes. At the end of the scheduled activity, the students reported their output using the audio-visual equipment to the rest of the class. Each pair of students had 1.7 hours per week at the computer.

The results of the project are among others: improvement of the students' and teachers' ICT skills; reduced absenteeism and dropout rates; improved classroom participation; mentorship among students by pairing Grade 6 and Grade 5 students.

The project won the top price in the 2007-2008 UNESCO ICT in Education Innovation Awards

(Ref.: Geneva Plan of Action Chapter 4 (C4): Capacity building and C7: E-learning, e.g. article 11d) "…ensure that young people are equipped with knowledge and skills to use ICTs, including the capacity to analyse and treat information in creative and innovative ways, share their expertise and participate fully in the Information Society."

Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content (C8)

What does the Plan of Action say?

Cultural and linguistic diversity, also essential for cultural identity, traditions and religions, is essential for a dialogue among cultures, for international cooperation and sustainable development in an information society.

UNESCO and stakeholders defined five main sub-themes, thus clustering the Plan of Action's most important issues:

a. Memory and heritage;
b. Local content and contemporary cultural expression;
c. Linguistic diversity;
d. Transversal research;
e. People with disabilities.

What has been achieved?

UNESCO, in a joint effort with stakeholders, works to protect and promote plurality and diversity, namely through a comprehensive series of international standard-setting instruments of seven conventions, including the:

➤ Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005);

➤ Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003).

Many activities were also implemented in the framework of the **International Year of Languages** (2008), including the creation of numerous websites with **multilingual tools and products, multimedia publications and studies**. A special highlight is represented by the **launching of the World Digital Library** (WDL), which makes available on the Internet, free of charge and in multilingual format, significant primary materials from countries and cultures around the world.

Media (C9)

What does the Plan of Action say?

Freedom of expression and the free flow of information, ideas and knowledge are essential for the information society and beneficial to development. Media have an essential role in the development of the information society and are recognized as an important contributor to freedom of expression and plurality of information.

UNESCO in consultation with stakeholders agreed to cluster the content of the items in the Plan of Action in four priority areas:

a. Freedom of expression and press freedom;
b. Media development and capacity building of media professionals;
c. Media and information literacy;
d. Community media.

What has been achieved?

The following are highlights of important achievements:

➤ The World Press Freedom Day, annual celebration: a series of international symposia and workshops on issues related to freedom of expression, every year with a different focus;

➤ Publications such as Freedom of Information: a Comparative Legal Survey available in all UN languages; Getting the Balance Right: Gender Equality in Journalism;

➤ Educational material, such as the Media Education Toolkit and the Freedom of Expression Toolkit for Secondary School Students, a model for teacher training or media and information literacy;

➤ 80 media development projects are launched in average per year in more than 70 developing countries – an international media development support mobilized through the Intergovernmental Programme for the Development of Communication;

➤ A set of Media Development Indicators (MDIs), recognized as a standard-setting tool to analyze the media development of a country. It has been

translated into six languages and is currently being applied in several pilot countries;

➤ Model journalism curricula for journalism schools, Bachelor's and Master's degrees. The curricula were so far adapted by 38 countries for their journalism training institutions;

➤ creativecontent.unesco.org – a multicultural online catalogue for independent producers and broadcasters;

➤ Community Media Centres Programme to reinforce community media.

Kabul Weekly goes online

Kabul Weekly, with its circulation of 10,000 copies, is the most widely distributed newspaper in Afghanistan, both in the centre and in the provinces.

Today, thanks to UNESCO in collaboration with Reporters without Borders and Open Society Institute, the paper reaches readers in cyberspace as well, making it accessible to an even larger audience.

The independent newspaper was first started in 1991 but was closed in 1994. It restarted its circulation immediately after the fall of the Taliban regime and now is the main newspaper read by Afghan people. The Kabul Weekly is published each Wednesday in English, Dari and Pashto. It is one of the few Afghan newspapers publishing articles in English and therefore attracts both local and foreign readers.

The online version of the paper offers latest news, social, economic and feature stories as well as information on Afghanistan's image in international media. In addition, it includes some of the most popular sections from the paper version: sport, cinema, satire, cartoons, letters from the readers and analytical articles.

(Ref.: The Geneva Plan of Action, Article 24: *" The media — in their various forms and with a diversity of ownership — as an actor, have an essential role in the development of the Information Society and are recognized as an important contributor to freedom of expression and plurality of information."*)

Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society (C10)

What does the Plan of Action say?

The Information Society should respect peace and be subject to universally held values, promote the common good and prevent abusive uses of information and communication technologies.

Therefore, fundamental values should be promoted and stakeholders should increase their awareness of the ethical dimension of information technology, and research on the ethical dimension should be done continuously.

What has been achieved?

UNESCO along with stakeholders takes affirmative actions and stimulates preventive measures against abusive uses of the information and communication technologies. The highlights of the actions in the area of info-ethics are:

➤ 4 regional conferences and seminars on ethics, for Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Europe and for the Asia-Pacific region held from 2006 to 2008. The purpose of theses conferences is to stimulate the reflection and the debate on the ethical, legal and social aspects in knowledge societies.

➤ The contributions to and results of these conferences have been published and made available to all interested parties.

➤ Creation of networks: Universities Network on Info-Ethics and Latin-American Youth Network on Info-Ethics, in order to integrate academic institutions and youth associations in Latin America in the awareness raising activities.

➤ Information Ethics and e-government High Level Executive Seminar followed by a training workshop held in South Africa, February 2009.

Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

The Declaration of Principles adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva recognized the Internet as a global facility available to the public. In order to ensure its governance to be multilateral, transparent and democratic, the UN Secretary-General endorsed the creation of a new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue on Internet governance issues: the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

Internet Governance is of key importance for UNESCO, as the Director-General, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura explained[3]: "Our mandate is to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image and to develop communication between peoples as a means of constructing inclusive, development-oriented knowledge societies based on the principle of freedom of expression, universal access to information, linguistic diversity and equal access to quality education".

Three IGF meetings have been held in 2006, 2007 and 2008, and UNESCO has also prepared five sessions and plenary contributions for the 2009 event; UNESCO contributed to the fora by organizing workshops, participating as panelist and promoting its constructive, inclusive, open and development oriented vision throughout the preparatory processes and events.
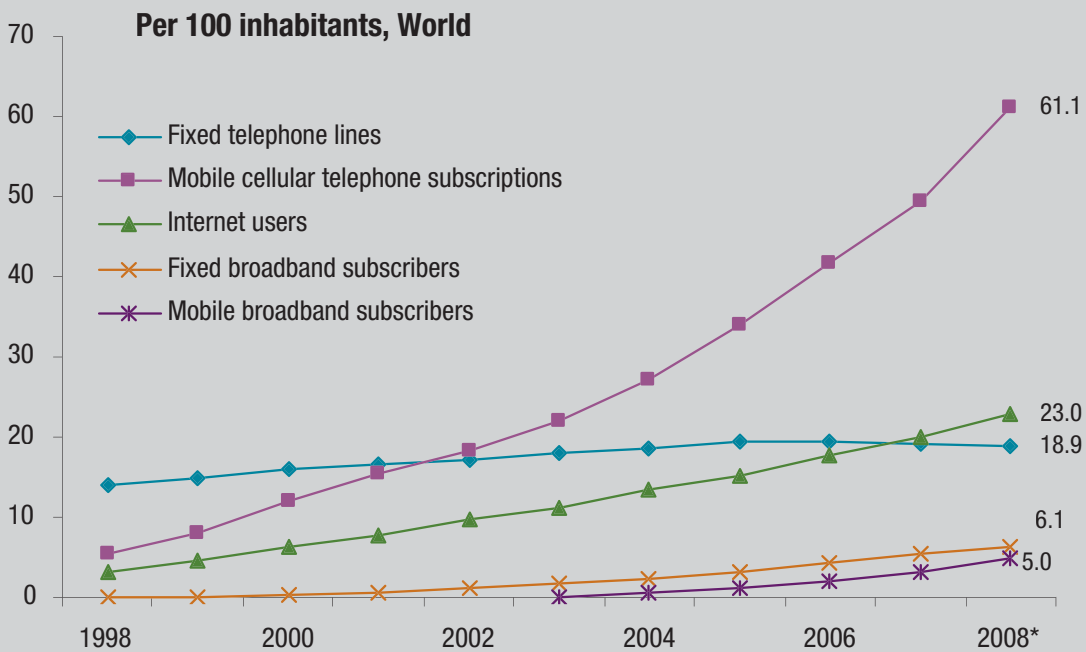
What has been achieved?

➤ UNESCO contributed to the Internet Governance debates in its fields of competence, by advocating strongly for mechanisms based on the principles of openness and diversity, encompassing universal access, freedom of expression, interoperability and measures to resist any attempt to censor content;

➤ Supported the multistakeholder approach of the forum ensuring the presence of experts and of developing countries views, supporting also gender balanced and youth participation;

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3   In his foreword to *Internet Governance Forum (IGF). The First Two Years* (UNESCO 2008)

➤ Contributed to the 'enhanced cooperation' among relevant international organizations to develop globally-applicable principles on public policy issues associated with the coordination and management of critical Internet resources;

➤ Advocated for more inclusive and transparent processes to enhance linguistic diversity on the Internet by providing expertise to and working with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) to ensure full representation of all languages and scripts on the Internet.

This will further promote the free flow of ideas and enhance communication between peoples towards constructing inclusive, development-oriented knowledge societies.

Global ICT Developments 1998-2008

Per 100 inhabitants, World

- Fixed telephone lines
- Mobile cellular telephone subscriptions
- Internet users
- Fixed broadband subscribers
- Mobile broadband subscribers

Source: ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database.

* Estimates.

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WSIS makes a difference because

- It stresses the human dimension of the Information Society.

- It puts education, knowledge, information and communication at the core of human progress, endeavor and well-being.

- It helps create information literate societies.

- It recognizes the power of ICTs to promote dialogue among people, nations and civilizations.

- It helps bridging the knowledge divide and ensure harmonious, fair and equitable development for all.

- It helps provide universal, ubiquitous, equitable, non-discriminatory and affordable access to information and knowledge.

- It recognizes the power of ICTs to help eradicate poverty

- It facilitates a large participatory process towards inclusive, free and open knowledge societies.