

Document WSIS/PC/CONTR/2-E  
12 July 2002  
English & French only

**CANADIAN CONTRIBUTION TO WSIS PREPCOM I  
Geneva, 1-5 July 2002**

**Canada's Vision for WSIS**

***WSIS is about development***

UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 sets two general goals for the summit:

- *“to marshal the global consensus and commitment required to promote the urgently needed access of all countries to information, knowledge and communications technologies for development”;*
- *“to address the whole range of relevant issues related to the information society”.*

Canada supports a WSIS agenda and outcomes that focus on development goals from the beginning – particularly those set out in the UN Millennium Declaration. WSIS presents a unique opportunity to:

- focus the attention of world leaders on how people in developing countries can access, adapt and use technology to communicate and create information and knowledge in pursuit of their development goals;
- recognize that economic, social, cultural and political needs – as defined by people in developing countries in light of their own development objectives – should be the driving force in any initiatives undertaken by the international community as a result of the Summit;
- agree at the highest levels on a new, global approach to designing, financing and implementing development initiatives – an approach that is
  - led by developing countries;
  - focused on geographical communities and communities of interest;
  - enabled by partnerships among government, the private sector and civil society.

In the context of an overall focus on development issues, Canada believes that the summit should pay particular attention to the following considerations:

- International cooperation undertaken as a result of the summit should be focused on initiatives that most directly affect poverty reduction. This will target the enabling

effects of information, knowledge and technology to areas where they have the broadest impacts, in terms of economic, social, cultural and political development. It will also build awareness and skills that will eventually sustain the information society in the developing world.

- The information society should provide greater opportunities for developing country women in education, work and public life, just as it has in the developed world. Special emphasis should therefore be placed on this component of the information society.
- The information society is not just about the Internet. For many developing communities, the connectivity and bandwidth required for good Internet access is still years away. There is still much progress that can be made with other technologies, such as traditional telecommunications and broadcasting, prior to the widespread availability of reliable Internet access.

WSIS must not miss the opportunity to systematically link information, knowledge and technology with user needs and development goals at the levels of value, principle, policy and practice. The summit should avoid the temptation to engage in a general discussion of all the issues raised by the information society, particularly those that are mainly of concern to developed countries. However, this focus on development should not preclude interested parties from organizing parallel events to discuss these wider issues, which are also of great and increasing importance to the international community.

***The information society is about social, cultural and economic and governance goals, not technological means***

According to Res. 56/183, WSIS should achieve its goals through:

- *“the development of a common vision and understanding of the information society”;*
- *“the adoption of a declaration and a plan of action for implementation by Governments, international institutions and all sectors of civil society.”*

In Canada's view:

- The first of these tasks calls on all delegations and observers to focus on the challenges and opportunities facing developing countries in the context of the emerging information society, in order to forge a common vision and shared understanding of the social, cultural, economic and governance goals that should be achieved through cooperative action by all members of the international community, with the aim of creating a truly global information society that includes all countries and peoples.
- The second of these tasks requires WSIS participants to agree on
  - a set of principles and objectives to guide governments, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations as they work together to help developing countries achieve these goals;
  - a set of practical actions, which these parties jointly, agree to support.

- The WSIS vision, declaration and action plan must be realistic and attainable. The summit must avoid creating undue expectations and must not simply be a declaration of good intentions;

In developing a shared vision, guiding principles and a plan of action, WSIS should bear in mind that technology is a means, not an end in itself. This view is based on Canada's many years of experience in building an information society within our country, and in sharing the fruits of this experience with other countries and the international community as a whole.

- Through the Connecting Canadians agenda (<http://www.connect.gc.ca>) during the past seven years we have *inter alia*:
  - achieved 100% geographic coverage of the Internet, including the remotest areas of our arctic regions through the use of satellite communications;
  - seeded the introduction of millions of computers in Canadian schools, by supplying more than 340,000 free refurbished "Computers For Schools";
  - connected every school (15,600) and library (3,400) in the country;
  - connected 11,000 civil society organizations;
  - established 8800 community access points where residents and businesses can connect with services that respond to their needs in such areas as education, training, health care, employment, community development and government services;
  - supported the creation of content, which fully reflects Canada's historical experience, the values shared by its peoples, its linguistic diversity, and its cultural richness – with special emphasis on the needs of aboriginal peoples.
- Internationally, Canada has drawn on this experience to assist others:
  - in the Americas, through our leadership at the 2001 Summit of the Americas and the creation of the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas (<http://www.icamericas.net>);
  - in Africa, through the International Development Research Center Acacia Program (<http://www.idrc.ca/ACACIA>);
  - globally, through initiatives such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) strategy on Knowledge for Development through ICTs and our leadership of the G8 DOT Force (<http://www.dotforce.org>).

8. Although developed countries like Canada now take the benefits of information and knowledge technologies for granted, there has been considerable debate about whether they should be a priority for developing countries, particularly the poorest countries. In Canada's view, information, knowledge and technology are vital enabling tools for economic growth, social and cultural development, and civic enrichment in all countries.

9. There are a growing number of real-life examples of how people in developing countries are using technology to create, access and communicate information and knowledge in the

pursuit of their immediate development goals. In the Akashganga (“Milky Way”) project in a rural Indian community, the use of a simple MS-DOS based personal computer application resulted in the speedier collection of milk from farmers, timely disbursement of payments, and a lower prevalence of corrupt practices. Today, this self-directed and self-funded project is of direct daily benefit to more than 1.5 million farmers, thereby dispelling the myths that rural citizens are reluctant to accept technology, that they lack the education and skills needed to use it, and that heavy subsidization is required to extend technology applications into rural areas.

- In the Village Pay Phone (VPP) Initiative in Bangladesh, cellular phones are provided to a group of women who, in turn, make the phone available to all users in the village. This project, which is expected to become the largest wireless pay phone project in the world, is providing Bangladesh citizens with better market information, saving transportation costs, and empowering women with increased knowledge and confidence. In the Community Information Centre (CIC) project in Niger, local farmers in the field, herders out to pasture with their flocks, and women doing laundry at the watering hole now receive vital up-to-the-minute information on weather disaster warnings and on a variety of other topics including health and nutrition, environmental conservation and HIV/AIDS prevention through community radio stations. In the spirit

of these practical examples, we suggest that WSIS should aim to highlight and help people learn from best practices, particularly those that could be shared between people facing similar challenges on both a south-south and south-north basis.

### ***WSIS must add value to current initiatives***

10. WSIS will cost a lot in terms of money, time and effort. It should add as much value as possible to the many efforts currently underway to advance development through information, knowledge and technology.

11. PrepCom should take stock of and build on the large amount of work that has been done in recent years.

- In developing a shared vision and common understanding of the social, cultural, economic, and governance challenges facing developing countries and other members of the international community in the information society, PrepCom should carefully review the following documents, which may already have defined many of the values, principles and goals that are relevant to the summit declaration:
  - the ACC *Statement on Universal Access to Basic Communication and Information Services* (1997);
  - the G8 *Okinawa Charter on the Information Society* (July 2000);
  - the ECOSOC *Ministerial Declaration Development and International Cooperation in the Twenty-First Century: the Role of Information Technology in the Context of a Knowledge-Based Global Economy* (July 2000);
  - the United Nations *Millennium Declaration* (September 2000);

- the OAU *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NePad, July 2001).
  - In developing a draft Plan of Action for the international community, PrepCom should carefully review the work programmes of the G8 DOT Force Implementation Network and the United Nations ICT Task Force. These bodies have launched comprehensive action plans to address the main development goals identified in their deliberations. Most importantly, they are already operating on the basis of partnership between governments, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations. There are valuable lessons to be learned from this recent and new experience.
12. In conducting these reviews, Canada believes that PrepCom 1 should:
- ask how WSIS could add value to what has already been agreed and is in the process of being implemented through various forums, programs and initiatives;
  - focus discussion and debate about globalization and the role played by technology in this process in a way that minimizes sterile confrontation, engages the private sector and civil society, and leads to constructive, practical outcomes.

**WSIS Theme: Community-Based Development: Linking Policy and Practice**

13. On the basis of the foregoing considerations and in light of its own experience, Canada proposes that community-based development should be a major focus of WSIS, one that should guide us in our treatment of the major themes agreed for the summit.

- Communities are where most people experience the developmental benefits that can result from using technology to access, create, share and communicate information and knowledge – in work, at school, through health care and other public services, and by participating in public life.
- As the examples set out in the preceding section illustrate, communities are the central point at which all the main elements of the sustainable development equation come together. They are the place where practical actions to provide access to information, knowledge and technology can bring development goals of the kind set out in the Millennium Declaration “down to earth”, so that they make a real and demonstrable difference in people’s lives through:
  - reliable and affordable local access to telecommunications infrastructure and services, including telephone, radio, satellite, broadcasting and Internet;
  - applications and services designed for local development needs;
  - content created in local languages, adapted to local needs, and reflecting local values.

14. In recent years, significant progress has been made at the national, regional and international levels in devising “top-down” policies and programmes aimed at putting in place the foundations for an inclusive information society. These programs sought to harness the creative force of technology, the dynamism of the private sector, and the efficiency of competitive markets.

- As the 2002 ITU World Telecommunication Development Report illustrates, some developing countries have made very significant progress made over the past two decades in developing telecommunications infrastructure and services through policies favouring privatization, liberalization, competition and the establishment of independent regulatory authorities.
- These policies have also supported the world-wide growth of the Internet and are beginning to result in much wider access to the information, knowledge and applications it enables and provides.
- International organizations, development agencies, national governments, the private sector and non-for-profit organizations have launched programmes aimed at stimulating the creation of knowledge, improving communication, and using technology to help achieve development goals through applications such as e-commerce, e-learning, e-health, e-culture and e-government.
- The Millennium Declaration and the recent Summit on Children have directed the attention of the international community to adequate levels of basic education - a prerequisite to participation in the information society.

15. While there has been considerable “top-down” policy progress, “bottom-up” perspectives on the needs of different communities – i.e. perspectives articulated by and for community members – have not been equally prominent in efforts made by the international community. Literally and figuratively, they have often been “the missing link” or “the last mile” in the quest to build an inclusive, global information society.

- In spite of the great progress made in raising global connectivity in the last twenty years many communities in developing countries are not connected to the telecommunications infrastructure because there is not yet a “business case” for doing so.
- Even if geographical communities are connected to infrastructure, it does not follow that all members have reliable and affordable access to services, or that appropriate applications and content are available.
- As well as geographical communities, there are many important communities of interest – such as women, youth, aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, and other minorities – that are relatively disadvantaged in terms of access to information, knowledge and technology.

16. The challenge in connecting all these kinds of communities is sustainability – in both the economic and social senses.

- While there have been a number of “top-down” experiments to provide connectivity through community telecentres, they generally have not been sustainable once project funding has run out. The DOT Force Implementation Network has launched a project to address this challenge.
- However, the experience of providing shared access to technology, information and knowledge resources is not entirely bleak. The success of commercial cyber-cafes and IDD shops in some developing countries provides an interesting counterpoint, which shows that affordable access can be sustainable if it meets needs of a

community as perceived by its members and developed with local capacities and resources.

17. Canada's experience has shown that top-down policies are not enough to build an inclusive information society and to promote sustainable development. It is also necessary to have community-based, bottom-up, demand-driven initiatives that respond to people's development needs and set realistic objectives in light of their current capacity.

- Our experience within Canada and internationally has shown that the likelihood of success is increased if initiatives of this kind are targeted towards social groups that find it relatively easy to adopt new technologies; to apply and adapt them to their information, communication and knowledge needs; and to mentor other members of the community in their use. We have found that young people usually fill this role most naturally, whatever their other demographic attributes, and whatever their economic, social or cultural environment. The information society is their future – and they are the future of the information society.
- Our experience has also shown that 'it is necessary to walk before you can run'. In both developed and developing countries, the economic, social and cultural adoption of technologies is never instantaneous. Instead, it resembles a learning process in which existing media, established ways of doing things and familiar patterns of interaction are complemented and progressively transformed by new possibilities on a continuum that runs from first acquaintance, to the exploration of possibilities, to innovation.

18. A community-based approach to information society development would provide an opportunity for WSIS to reinforce and advance one of the major innovations that has taken place in development policy in recent years – the recognition that partnership between government, the private sector and civil society actors from both developed and developing countries can be a very powerful development tool.

19. By systematically adopting a partnership strategy for supporting and enabling community-based development initiatives, WSIS has the opportunity to generate new development models that would complement traditional aid, trade and financing mechanisms. These new models would be particularly relevant for geographical communities or communities of interest where:

- purely public sector solutions are either not appropriate or not viable over the medium- or longer-term;
- there currently is no "business case" to attract private investment;
- significant economic, social or cultural adaptation of products and services may be necessary in order to achieve affordable local access to information, knowledge or technology, and to the development possibilities they create.

20. A WSIS focus on community-based, community-led development would achieve a number of the objectives set out in the previous section.

- It would add value to existing activities by addressing an important dimension that has been largely missing from previous international policy discussions and action plans.
- It would complement and add a practical dimension to the framework proposed by the WSIS secretariat in Doc. WSIS/COM04/PC1/03.
- It would make a tangible difference in people's lives by empowering communities to access information, knowledge and technology and to apply them for their own development needs.
- It would raise awareness and understanding at all levels of the links between technology, information, knowledge and development – from the highest political level to the village – thereby reinforcing other initiatives already underway at the national and international levels.
- It would provide a platform for practical cooperation between government, the private sector and civil society leading to real developmental results.
- It would lead to the development of new models of economic and social sustainability in areas lying outside current market boundaries that might be extended to other areas of development.
- It would address issues associated with globalization in a concrete, constructive way, leading to positive outcomes.

21. Canada therefore proposes that:

- In addition to providing for high-level, top-down discussion of the issues associated with the information society, the WSIS agenda should provide a bottom-up perspective of the challenges and opportunities facing communities in accessing technology, information and knowledge for development (e.g. via presentations to Heads of State from “real people” telling real stories).
- The WSIS Declaration should also establish goals such as:
  - connecting some reasonable proportion of the world's communities to information and knowledge resources needed for their development – reliably, affordably, and in local languages, via the mix of technologies they determine to be appropriate – by some reasonable date not too far in the future;
  - creating a global network of “community innovation hubs” that would help people exchange experiences and best practices in order to learn from community-generated models of economic, social and cultural sustainability.
- The WSIS Action Plan should indicate how governments, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations would work cooperatively to achieve these goals. The Action Plan should contain a set of concrete and practical initiatives and partnerships that will develop the capacity for communities to create, access and share information and knowledge resources on an economically and socially sustainable basis.

### **Working Together to Make WSIS a Success**

22. Governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations have begun preparing separately for WSIS. If the Summit is to succeed – particularly in developing and

implementing an Action Plan in which a main theme is community-based development – Canada believes that these activities must be brought together as quickly as possible so that points of agreement can be confirmed, differences of opinion identified and sorted out, and partnerships formed.

23. The Annex to this document presents two procedural options for achieving these objectives. At this point, these options are primarily intended to stimulate reflection. The precise modalities of cooperation between the different sectors will need to be determined in light of the overall approach adopted by PrepCom to WSIS participation by the private sector and civil society.

## **Options for Working Together to Make WSIS a Success**

### **Option One :**

- PrepCom I – agreement to the proposal to include community-based development as a central element of the WSIS Agenda, Declaration and Action Plan;
- Between PrepCom I and PrepCom II – government, civil society, private sector and international organizations work, each on their own, to take stock of what they are currently doing to support community-based development, and to identify what they believe needs to be done by the international community to achieve the goal of global connectedness;
- PrepCom II – presentation of results, identification of commonalities and points of difference, facilitation of joint, trilateral contributions to components for the WSIS Agenda, Declaration and Action Plan;
- Between PrepCom II and PrepCom III – planning work proceeds and the agenda and contributions are finalized;
- PrepCom III – results approved;
- WSIS Phase I – PrepCom results adopted by summit;
- Between WSIS Phase I and Phase II – action phase begins;
- WSIS Phase II – reviews results and adjusts goals, policies, operating principles and work plan as required;
- Post WSIS Phase II – action continues.

### **Option Two:**

- PrepCom I – agreement to the proposal to include community-based development as a central element of the WSIS Agenda, Declaration and Work Plan;
- Between PrepCom I and WSIS Phase I – government, civil society, private sector and international organizations work, each on their own, to take stock of what they are doing and to identify what needs to be done to meet the goal of global connectedness;
- WSIS Phase I – presentation of results in separate government, private sector and civil society forums, identification of commonalities and points of difference, facilitation of joint trilateral contributions for approval as part of the Summit Declaration and Action Plan;
- Between WSIS Phase I and Phase II – planning work proceeds;
- WSIS Phase II – results approved;
- Post WSIS Phase II – action phase begins.