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English only

International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD)

WSIS: Significance for Youth

This document outlines a proposed set of actions designed to:

1. Educate and engage youth around the world in the themes of the WSIS
2. Give youth a greater voice at the Summit
3. Help ensure that the positive vision of the Information Society that emerges from the Summit makes a lasting impression on the consciousness of the next generation of world citizens.

The plan outlined here, especially the final component involving a satellite launch, cannot be realized unless it sparks the imagination of other stakeholders and becomes a collective project

IICD Support for WSIS: Activities to date

The Netherlands-based International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) assists developing countries to realise locally owned sustainable development by harnessing the potential of ICTs. IICD works with partners in 8 countries (most of them in Africa), and is funded mainly by DGIS, DFID, and SDC. To date, IICD has been involved in the WSIS in various ways:

1. In the Netherlands, IICD is implementing, together with OneWorld and Hivos, a consultation on "[Building Inclusive Information Societies](#)." The goal of this activity is to enhance awareness of the WSIS issues in the Netherlands and to formulate a recommendation to the Dutch delegation to the Summit, in the EU context.
2. As a leading civil society organisation involved in ICTs for development, IICD has assisted at most of the major preparatory events including most recently, the planning meeting for the WSIS Civil Society Online Discussion Forum (UNESCO, 27-28 November, 2002).
3. IICD is supporting and encouraging its partners, especially in Africa, to start engaging with the WSIS themes. As an example, the May 2002 issue of *iConnect Africa*, a newsletter co-published by UNECA and IICD, dealt with Bamako 2002.
4. IICD has been involved in preliminary discussions with the Youth Caucus of the WSIS regarding tying in the activities of the Global Teenager Project with the Youth Caucus Strategic Plan.

Learning Circles: Linking classrooms through ICTs

IICD is committed to the idea to bring youth, especially secondary schools, into the WSIS process in a meaningful way, through The Global Teenager Project and specifically the Learning Circles. A Learning Circle simply involves linking up to 12 classrooms in a moderated online discussion supervised by teachers. As such, it can be applied in different ways to suit different contexts. Learning Circles are organized around solid educational content, and they are also an occasion for inter-cultural dialogue and learning about ICTs in a hands-on way.

With the support of our network of coordinators, schools, teachers and students, we suggest that the Learning Circle methodology be employed to enable secondary school students to discuss WSIS themes with each other in the months preceding the Geneva and Tunis events, shaped in such a way that the outcome of their dialogue gives voice to the opinions of global youth. *IICD could have WSIS-themed Learning Circles in place as early as March 2003.*

The specific educational content of the Learning Circles may range from a visioning exercise to science (satellite communications, etc.) to geography, etc. The WSIS themes should serve as a guideline for developing interesting cross-cultural topics with real educational substance. The manner of interface between the Learning Circles and the WSIS outcomes remains to be discussed; this negotiation should go hand in hand with the identification of the content to be discussed by the students. It is essential that the students have a clear understanding of how their activities are expected to impact the overall WSIS process and outcomes.

For IICD, and for others in the ICTs for development community, this will be an opportunity to link many existing "schoolnets" together in a common project. IICD proposes to organise and shape the process and bring partners to the table. The classroom-based activities require a simple set of online tools (email lists, web boards), a set of teacher guidelines, overall coordination, and awareness raising based on engaging education stakeholders and local authorities, essentially convincing them to incorporate this event into the curriculum as a one-time activity.

The scale of the project may evolve from small scale to large scale. On a small scale we could use only the existing GTP network, which includes 20 countries and approximately 180 classes (3500 students in total). On a medium scale, we would help implement Learning Circles via our current partners (SchoolNet Africa, Schools Online and I-EARN).

Longer term, and beyond this circle of current IICD partners, classroom link-up could include an even larger number of countries, with the buy-in of national education stakeholders. For (local, regional or national) governments involved, it will be an opportunity to focus attention on the ICT agenda. The modality can be heavy or light in any given country setting. Modularity and simplicity will ensure that the classroom activities can be successfully implemented in widely different cultural and political settings within the limited timeframe and given limited coordination resources.

Much of the long-term impact of this project will be at the personal and local community level. The students involved in this global exchange will be intellectually engaged not only with their counterpart classes but with the initiative as a whole, with the WSIS, and at a very personal level with the meaning of the information society, which they are being asked to define, imagine, and by extension create.

Summit events

According to our current thinking, the online events will culminate, shortly before the face-to-face Summit, in a contest or selection process in each region. The basis for selection has not been determined at this stage. However, in the final phase, representative towns, schools, or other social

units will emerge, with one or several youths nominated to speak for them in the international forum and in media events surrounding the Summit, in coordination with the Youth Caucus.

Needless to say that for individuals involved, it will be an unforgettable experience to represent their school, town, country and generation before the community of nations at this historic event.

At the Summit itself, we propose a demonstration exercise (modelled on the Africa Telecom 99 event^[1]) as a natural inauguration to the proceedings. However this should not be the end of the youth participation, and we are aware that others have taken the lead in organizing a Youth Caucus. IICD supports a strong youth-adult dialogue on substantive issues. We believe the presence of youth at the Summit will help create an environment of respect and will help ensure that all stakeholder groups stay “under the tent” and engaged in constructive dialogue with each other for the duration of the Summit.

Satellite launch

Taking the thought experiment a bit further, we imagine that the ITU authorities can make links with a scheduled communications satellite launch^[2]. The webcast launch event ([click to see an example](#)) would be formally tied in to the World Summit process. For the sponsoring consortium, their launch would be more than just a technological milestone; it would be an event of international significance, drawing media who will be looking for a “feel good” story with great visual potential, an exciting way of talking about the World Summit.

The basis for the tie-in is that the satellite itself, the physical object that for years to come will hover above the earth, sending and receiving human messages, will carry a physical trace of the young people’s participation, of their vision of the information society. For example, it might be named after one of their schools; it might have graffiti on its surface, or contain a capsule or plaque containing something contributed by them. The point is that the satellite becomes “theirs” in a symbolic sense. Every time they use a mobile phone they may imagine the words travelling up to “their” satellite and bouncing back down; “their” satellite circling the earth, throwing down a footprint that covers many nations, continuing to unite them with the peers with whom they interacted during the classroom events.

This element of the proposal has the added benefit of involving education and telecommunications infrastructure stakeholders in a joint enterprise which has well-defined roles for each group, each being equally critical to overall success. IICD’s role here would be to act as liaison between the educational activities and the space activities; only if the potential satellite partner is Dutch, would we be in a position to take the lead in negotiations with telecommunications consortia.

In this way the World Summit leaves a tangible trace in the sky and in our consciousness. Each person who participates, even in the most remote and virtual way, in this experience, has just visualized and reflected on the “information society” and pictured its global dimensions.

Considerations

- 1) Time is short. Discussions and decisions must proceed quickly.
- 2) Working with youth, especially in the South, entails a high level of commitment and integrity. For the participants, this event could be one of the most stimulating and motivating of their lives. However, if expectations are not met it can be the most disappointing. We need to be aware of this in every step we take.
- 3) IICD is willing to commit time, personnel and some financial resources, but will require additional financial support and the assistance of strategic partners to impement this proposal. If the idea is positively received and we can agree on common goals and

identify likely funders, IICD is willing to take the lead in the process starting with a project plan.

The Global Teenager Project *A world class initiative*



GLOBAL TEENAGER PROJECT

Imagine how lively a classroom debate on rainforests or HIV/AIDS would be if teachers and pupils could link up with their peers in Ghana or Surinam and get their opinions on the subject! Now, apply that thought to the school curriculum and you capture the essence of the Global Teenager Project (GTP). The Global Teenager Project enables classroom discussions to 'go global'. It gives secondary schools a kick-start in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and it provides students with a safe, structured environment in which to discuss global issues. It also gives them a strong basis in communication skills and valuable insights into other cultures. Finally, it livens up the whole teaching process as teachers incorporate new ideas and methods into their classes.

School: the missing link

Global advertising, satellite television and the Internet have brought an entire generation of teenagers closer together by exposing them to identical images. New ICTs can narrow the gap even further by giving teenagers worldwide a safe, structured virtual meeting place in which they can discuss ideas. School would seem to be the obvious venue for this, so what is the story so far? To date, while many schools in developed countries have integrated ICT skills into the curriculum, most schools in developing countries are still in this process or are getting connected. What binds them together is that most schools in developed as well as developing countries have not yet succeeded in harnessing ICTs to a specific purpose like research or intercultural exchange or, for instance, collaborative and international learning. This is where the GTP comes in: it offers schools a tried, tested and low-tech solution.

It is not only the students who benefit; teachers also get a lot from the Global Teenager network. They can use it to find out about different teaching styles, as well as strategies adopted by other countries to tackle global educational issues. It also helps them brush up on their own ICT skills.



"The effects of globalisation in our culture are that many people are watching TV and listening to overseas music. Long ago the people of our culture used to play games like nhodo and playing drums as their entertainment."
Quote from Mucheke High School, Zimbabwe

A world class initiative

Today, Global Teenager involves more than 2,500 pupils from 120 schools in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East, and the number is rising. The Global Teenager Project was launched by the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) to meet the ICT needs of students, teachers and secondary schools. Pupils embrace the Global Teenager Project because it makes learning fun and enables them to meet their peers all over the world as never before. Teachers are inspired because it provides a new and exciting way to deliver lessons. Schools are happy because it uses expensive ICT infrastructure to reach curricular goals.

International Learning Circles

The powerhouse behind the Global Teenager Project is the 'Learning Circle' concept, brainchild of American educator Margaret Riell. In a nutshell, Learning Circles are web-based, virtual environments for intercultural exchange and learning. The Learning Circle set-up works as follows: twice a year, under the guidance of facilitators and Country Coordinators, groups of 8 to 10 classes from different schools all over the world link up via e-mail or the web to form a Learning Circle. All communication is visible on the Virtual Campus website: www.iicd.org/virtualcampus. The teacher plays a key role in the process. The classes select a theme from a shortlist of topics ranging from health, environment, human rights, globalisation and 'my life'. For the next ten weeks the secondary school pupils in each Learning Circle e-mail each other on that one topic, using a structured six-phase method:

- **Phase 1:** Teachers prepare their pupils to take part in the Learning Circles and learn how to manage incoming mail.
- **Phase 2 (weeks 1-2):** Students say 'hello' to other Learning Circle schools using an open Class Letter introducing themselves and their school.
- **Phase 3 (week 3):** Students sponsor a question for the Learning Circle.
- **Phase 4 (weeks 4-6):** Students answer the sponsored questions posed in the Learning Circle.
- **Phase 5 (weeks 7-9):** Students reflect upon their thoughts, summarize, and send their final report.

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- **Phase 6** (week 10): Students say 'goodbye' to each other. The Learning Circle is formally closed.

GTP includes both English and French Learning Circles. Another added value of the Learning Circles is that they do not impose content on anyone. The content is formed by the participants themselves and as such reflects local contexts. Schools can experiment with different and exciting new approaches to both learning and teaching, sharing their findings with other schools.

Partners

GTP owes its success to local and international collaborative partnerships. Its extensive network includes representatives from many different sectors and at every level, from schools, government bodies and NGOs, to embassies, corporate enterprises and other global networks such as iEARN, World Links for Development, and SchoolNet Africa. Everyone is a valued stakeholder in the Global Teenager Project.

Benefits

Regular feedback highlights the following benefits:

- **Educational activities** – These are regularly assessed with input from pupils, teachers and the Country Coordinators.
- **Intercultural exchange** – Stereotypical images and preconceived ideas give way to a deeper intercultural understanding and sensitivity to other belief systems.
- **Life-long learning skills** – Students are given a solid grounding in critical thinking, teamwork and independent learning, using ICT media.
- **Democratic information exchange** – GTP's virtual environment creates a level playing field

where everyone is equal and an expert in his or her own field. Knowledge flows in all directions!

- **Lasting friendships** are formed which continue long after the Learning Circle has ended.
- **Teacher-training programmes** – Teachers are taught ICT skills and shown how to integrate ICT in the classroom using new teaching concepts, such as project-based learning.

Assess and re-assess

There is no point investing in equipment and training if, for whatever reason, a school drops out after six months. This is why the Global Teenager Project subjects itself to frequent critical internal and external assessments and sets realistic goals for itself. Feedback is encouraged from all those taking part so that we can build on our successes and learn from our mistakes. The project also has built-in mechanisms to ensure long-term sustainability, such as encouraging local involvement in and ownership of the project; having Country Coordinators oversee the project on site and act as trouble-shooters; and persuading local businesses to sponsor schools in their area.

More information

If you would like to join the Global Teenager Project, please contact one of the project's programme officers at globalteenager@iicd.org. If other schools or businesses in your country are already participating in the project we will bring you into contact with your Country Coordinator who will instruct you further. For more information you can also visit our website at www.iicd.org/globalteenager.

The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) assists developing countries to realise locally owned sustainable development by harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs). IICD realises its mission through two strategic approaches. First, Country Programmes bring local organisations together and help them to formulate and execute ICT-supported development policies and projects. The approach aims to strengthen local institutional capacities to develop and manage Country Programmes, which are currently being implemented in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Jamaica, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Second, Thematic Networks link local and international partners working in similar areas, connecting local knowledge with global knowledge and promoting South-South and South-North exchanges. Thematic Networks focus on sectors and themes like education, health, governance, the environment, livelihood opportunities (especially agriculture), and training. These efforts are supported by various information and communication activities provided by IICD or its partners. IICD is an independent non-profit foundation, established by the Netherlands Ministry for Development Cooperation in 1997. Its core funders include the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGIS), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).