

Report of the WSIS Indigenous Thematic Planning Conference for Tunisia
March 17 – 18, 2005
Ottawa, Canada

Introduction:

1. This report provides an overview of discussions held at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Indigenous Planning Conference for Tunisia, held in Ottawa, Canada from March 17 to March 18, 2005. This conference built on the WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action of the first phase of WSIS, as well as the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society.
2. In March 2005, the Government of Canada, the Aboriginal Canada Portal and Connectivity Working Group and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues hosted the WSIS Indigenous Thematic Planning Conference for Tunisia. This was the only Indigenous-specific conference in the lead-up to the second phase of WSIS, and was attended by Ambassador Janis Karklins (Chairman of the WSIS PrepCom process), Indigenous participants from more than 30 countries, representatives from several international organizations and officials from several countries.
3. The purpose of the WSIS Indigenous Thematic Planning Conference for Tunisia was to explore opportunities for: bridging the digital divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; the effective use of information and communication technologies by Indigenous peoples for sustainable development, poverty reduction and other goals; and, for keeping the issue of Indigenous connectivity front and centre on the international Indigenous agenda.
4. In addition, questions were asked regarding what form Indigenous participation at the second phase of WSIS will take, who will champion these issues, and how we all will continue to work together on the Road to Tunisia and beyond.
5. In answer to these questions, it was agreed that the creation of overlapping, interlocking communities of interest with State, Indigenous, NGO, academic, and private sector partners will be required to ensure the Indigenous component of the second phase of WSIS is as large and as influential as possible.
6. The Indigenous Thematic Planning Conference for Tunisia focused on the following themes in relation to Indigenous connectivity:
 - Indigenous Media and the Arts;
 - E-health;
 - E-government;
 - Millennium Development Goals and Connectivity (particularly poverty reduction and education);
 - Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights;
 - Cultural Diversity; and,
 - Gender Equality.

Indigenous Media and the Arts

7. Co-Chairs for this session were Kenneth Deer (Canada) and Jay Roberts (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Canada), and panelists were Roberto Borrero (USA), Naja Paulsen (Greenland), Felix Gutierrez (Bolivia), Ann-Kristin Hakansson (Sweden), and Jayanyu Farias Montiel (Venezuela).

8. Best practices specific to Indigenous Media and the Arts include: UCTP.org (the only on-line resource representing diverse voices of Caribbean Indigenous peoples which is developed, controlled and financed by Caribbean indigenous peoples); Bolivian Aymara radio; Saami radio and television; Wayuunaiki (a newspaper for the Wayu nation of Venezuela); Greenland Radio; the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network of Canada; and, Canada's www.metisradio.fm, the first ever web-based Métis Radio Station.
9. Challenges specific to Indigenous Media and the Arts include: the impact of mainstream media; the need for Indigenous education in Indigenous languages; the need for institutional acceptance of distance education; how to deal with ethical issues regarding traditional knowledge and Indigenous media; and, the sustainability of Indigenous media.
10. Options for the path forward specific to Indigenous Media and the Arts include: support for the creation of a news list server, intranet or other virtual forum dedicated to WSIS and the Indigenous agenda; support for the creation of national Indigenous portals or one international Indigenous portal; support for the creation of an organization or virtual network of Indigenous journalists; the need for protection of the rights and lives of Indigenous journalists, particularly in the developing world; States should recognize the right of Indigenous peoples to establish media in their own languages; and, Indigenous journalists should consider production of a newsletter or newspaper for Tunisia.

E-health

11. Co-Chairs for this session were Ernie Dal Grande (Canada) and Dr. Renato Sabbatini (Brazil), and panelists were Dr. Carlos Kiyari (Peru), Donna Williams (Canada), Esperanza Reyes (Peru), Dr. Javier Pero (Peru), Dr. Richard Scott (Canada), Francisco Llamas (Mexico), Dr. Keber Araujo (Canada), and Terry Fox (Canada).
12. Best practices specific to E-health include: partnerships between community, government and the private sector, including knowledge transfers at the community level; and educational programs have resulted in building the knowledge of community health professionals, and in further enabling the community.
13. Challenges specific to E-health include: the sustainability of e-health infrastructure and programs; and, the need for Indigenous human resource capacity building in the field of E-health.
14. Options for the path forward specific to E-health include: the development and dissemination of best practices; support for the creation of a global Indigenous E-health information portal; the development of partnerships between NGOs, communities, governments and the private sector; support for the promotion of an internationally accepted terminology around E-health; ethical, legal and privacy issues need to be shared and discussed internationally; and, collaborating with Indigenous communities to jointly develop evaluation tools for assessing the benefits of health technology transfer and establishing community criteria for successful implementation.

E-Government On-line Applications

15. Co-Chairs for this session were Ian MacArthur (Canada), and Elissavet Stamatopoulou (Secretariat, UN Permanent Forum), and panelists were Charlotte Moser (USA), Ernest Franklin and David Stephens (Navaho Nation), Wulfrano Castro (Mexico), Sylvanie Burton (Dominica), Marcos Terena (Brazil), Mohammed Hiraika (Sudan), and Teanau Tuiono (New Zealand).

16. Best practices specific to E-Government include: the experience of the Navajo Nation in revolutionizing their governance system; the Development Gateway, an international agency, includes a Global Indigenous Portal with local content development; and, in Canada, a working definition of Aboriginal E-government is emerging.
17. Challenges specific to E-government include: need for technology and capacity, training and skills development support, and funding for the same; concerns regarding the impact of ICTs on culture and youth; lack of consistent national e-government leadership; lack of organized Indigenous organizations in some parts of the world; and, in some regions, it is necessary to incorporate and accommodate a number of Indigenous languages.
18. Options for the path forward specific to E-government include: more explicit efforts should be made to broaden stakeholders in the WSIS E-government vision; such efforts would benefit from an international Indigenous partnership portal; need for Indigenous NGOs to begin developing E-government strategies; need for Indigenous communities to control medium and content; E-government applications could include e-democracy, on-line transaction processing, and on-line citizen engagement; Indigenous communities can and are blending and integrating traditional values and images within their virtual space; and, need to begin developing a growing and easily accessible inventory of on-line best practices and related practitioners database for accelerating knowledge transfer.

Millennium Development Goals and Connectivity

19. Co-Chairs for this session were Wilton Littlechild (UN Permanent Forum), and Regional Chief Jason Goodstriker (Assembly of First Nations, Canada), and panelists were Erick Huerta Velazquez (Mexico), Masiane James Kaipoi (Tanzania), Natalia Rodionova (Russian), Mohamed Boucha (Niger), Chupinit Kesmanee (Thailand), and Leliah Antony Parmeres (Kenya).
20. Best practices specific to the Millennium Development Goals and Connectivity include: the development of Indigenous portals and websites; the development of community-based ICT and education institutions; Mexico's development of telecentres; Kenya's development of community-based initiatives on basic needs and capacity in education and health; in Russia, ICTs are vital to the preservation of threatened cultures and languages; in Tanzania, community radio in indigenous languages has been extremely successful in educating and informing remote communities.
21. Challenges specific to Millennium Development Goals and Connectivity include: access, affordability, sustainability and relevance of content to local needs are critical elements of utilizing ICTs for development.
22. Options for the path forward specific to Millennium Development Goals and Connectivity include: Indigenous peoples need to continue to practice advocacy, co-ordination, solidarity, mainstreaming of Indigenous issues in international agencies, and building of partnerships among other stakeholders.

Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights

23. Co-Chairs for this session were Tony Belcourt (Métis National Council, Canada) and Peter Songan (Malaysia), and panelists were Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (Philippines) and Tarcila Rivera (Peru).

24. Best practices specific to Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights include: the Malaysian E-Bario project in Sarawak; the Kanak Maoli of Hawaii use ICTs for education and awareness building; and, the Quecha of Peru use ICTs for education and empowerment.
25. Challenges specific to Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights include: the fact that ICTs have the potential to both benefit and threaten Indigenous culture; biopiracy and exploitation by multinational corporate interests; the need to educate states, NGOs, and the private sector on the validity and integrity of Indigenous traditional knowledge systems; and, the need for Indigenous community members to respect customary law regarding traditional knowledge and the protection of cultural heritage.
26. Options for the path forward specific to Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights include: showcasing best practices of ICT use for Indigenous sustainable development; making better use of ICTs to facilitate communications between Indigenous peoples; and, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is encouraged to co-ordinate efforts of UN Agencies and international bodies regarding Indigenous traditional knowledge.

Cultural Diversity

27. Co-Chairs for this session were Tony Belcourt (Métis National Council, Canada), and Peter Songan (Malaysia), and panelists were Ignacio Prafil (Argentina), Marleny Tzicap (Guatemala), and Sozinho Matsinhe (Mozambique).
28. Best practices specific to Cultural Diversity include: the inter-cultural bilingual education program of the Mapuche of Argentina; Canadian collaboration between the government and Aboriginal groups on capacity development; Guatemalan interactive cd-rom in 14 different Indigenous languages relating an Indigenous depiction of their own culture; and, throughout Africa, the importance of community radio cannot be underestimated.
29. Challenges specific to Cultural Diversity include: language retention and education is necessary to cultural preservation; even within Indigenous communities there is a digital divide; gender equality is still not realized worldwide; integration and transfer of content is difficult because of the variety of ICT modalities; colonial languages continue to impact preservation and usage of Indigenous languages; and, there is an apparent disconnect between modern sustainable development strategies and multicultural and multilingual diversity promotion.
30. Options for the path forward specific to Cultural Diversity include: engagement and encouragement for continued role for Global Knowledge Partnership in championing Indigenous connectivity; the role of ICTs for cultural preservation and intercultural dialogue should be featured within the second phase of WSIS; ICTs should be used for the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity within sustainable development strategies; strengthen regional coordination to share experiences and information and to rationalize the human and financial resource use; and, capture and collect the documents of presentations at this and similar fora for archiving both video and print presentations in the conference reports.

Gender Equality

31. Co-Chairs for this session were Julie Delahanty (Canada) and Celeste McKay (Native Women's Association of Canada), and panelists were Mirian Masaquiza (Secretariat, UN Permanent Forum), Sanjeeb Drong (Bangladesh), Lucky Sherpa (Nepal), Saoudata Aboubacarine (Burkina Faso), and Grace Bwalya (Zambia).

32. Best practices specific to Gender Equality include: using traditional methods to promote ICTs and gender equality; using ICTs to link the grassroots to broader global issues; using research to determine the usefulness of ICTs to women's empowerment; using ICTs to communicate and share information between Indigenous groups; and, the Bolivian experience of recovering indigenous history to move forward and reaching people through radio soap operas.
33. Challenges specific to Gender Equality include: the advancement of ICTs has excluded Indigenous women; Indigenous women lack access to ICTs and material is gender insensitive; continued discrimination against Indigenous peoples; Indigenous women do not have a voice in decision-making; and, limited air time on the radio or low range of radio transmission both reduce Indigenous communication with people outside their community.
34. Options for the path forward specific to Gender Equality include: link traditional forms of communication with ICTs; the use of grassroots workshops for men and women on use and ownership of technology; the development of an enabling ICT policy framework for women and vulnerable populations; encourage and support human rights training for women; promotion of gender equality in the UN system; the creation of effective Indigenous peoples networks through the use of ICTs; promote research and implementation of a strategy of information, education and communication aimed at promoting a balanced portrayal of Indigenous women and girls and their multiple roles; encourage gender-sensitive training for the media in regard to their portrayal of Indigenous women; and, train Indigenous women to make greater use of information technology for communication and the media, including at the international level.

WSIS International Indigenous Steering Committee (IISC)

35. At the Closing Plenary session of the Indigenous Thematic Planning Conference for Tunisia, the WSIS International Indigenous Steering Committee (IISC) was formed. The IISC is committed to working together to bringing Indigenous peoples to Tunisia for a second Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society, to ensuring a robust and inclusive agenda, and to ensuring the international dialogue regarding Indigenous connectivity does not end with the second phase of WSIS.
36. The IISC is composed of: two (2) Indigenous members (preferably one male and one female) from each of the seven (7) regions of the world as recognized by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; one (1) State member from each of the seven (7) regions; and, up to seven (7) members from the evolving community of interest, to include UN Agencies, NGOs, the private sector and the academic community. The IISC will therefore be composed of up to 28 members. In addition, there will be a number of sub-committees, to be brought together on a more informal basis.
37. Indigenous members of the IISC are as follows: Parmeres Leliah Antony and Saoudata Aboubacrine (Africa); Lucky Sherpa and Chupinit Kesmanee (Asia); Joe Norton and Joe Shirley (North America); Roberto Borrero and Marcos Terena (Central and South America and Caribbean); Teanau Tuiono and Malia Obrega (Pacific); Irina Kurilova (former USSR and Eastern Europe); and, Ann-Kristin Hakansson and Naja Paulsen (Arctic).
38. Currently, Canada is represented as the North American State member of the IISC by John Sinclair. Other members of the IISC are: Wilton Littlechild, Member, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; Mary Stapleton, Managing Director, Arctic Circumpolar Route; and, Natalie Drache, Producer, Dialogue Between Nations/dbn.tv.

39. The Secretariat of the IISC is composed of a number of Canadian government officials (Dan Hughes, Brian Phillips, Ian MacArthur, and France Beauvais) and Mirian Masaquiza, Secretariat, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Challenges and the Path Forward

40. At the Closing Plenary session, the following **challenges** to bridging the digital divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples were highlighted. This is a synthesis of the challenges brought forward by Indigenous participants under each of the themes discussed:
- Funding, both for community ICT development and international Indigenous participation in the WSIS process and beyond;
 - Lack of community connectivity infrastructure, as well as other infrastructure needs, such as electricity;
 - Capacity development;
 - Lack of respect for Indigenous cultures and languages in the information age;
 - Racism, discrimination and human rights abuses;
 - Sustainability of ICT infrastructure and programs; and,
 - Lack of consistent national government leadership and support for Indigenous peoples in the information age.
41. Finally, the following synthesis of ideas for the **path forward** as articulated by Indigenous participants under each of the themes discussed was also brought forward at the Closing Plenary:
- Support for the WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action in guiding continued discussion and action in the national and international arenas;
 - Support for the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society in guiding continued discussion and action in the national and international arenas;
 - Indigenous-specific strategies should be formulated in the development of national communications strategies in support of the WSIS Plan of Action;
 - The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues should be encouraged to continue in its leadership role on the issue of Indigenous connectivity;
 - Increased partnerships among Indigenous peoples, States, UN Agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and the academic community should be pursued;
 - Support for the creation of national and international Indigenous portals;
 - Support for the creation of a transparent, inclusive WSIS International Indigenous Steering Committee. This body should help disseminate best practices in the entire range of ICT development;
 - The WSIS International Indigenous Steering Committee should include a number of sub-groups on topics such as E-Health, E-Government, etc. to assist in identifying a broad range of partnerships and key stakeholders, and in developing issue-specific content for the Road to Tunisia; and,
 - The WSIS International Indigenous Steering Committee should be active at a number of international events leading up to the second phase of WSIS, November 14-19, 2005, in Tunisia.