



**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

Conference of Directors of National Libraries

74th IFLA General Conference and Council

Québec, Canada, 10-14 August 2008

UNESCO's Report on WSIS implementation

Remarks by

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13 August 2008

As the lead facilitator Agency for six of the eleven WSIS Action Lines (Access to information and knowledge, e-learning, e-science, media, cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content, and ethical dimensions of the Information Society), UNESCO has organized several meetings involving governments, UN agencies, civil society and private sector representatives with the overall objective of fostering greater participation in order to achieve concrete results.

Under Action Line, Access to information and knowledge, emphasis is placed on the human dimension of building knowledge societies, focusing on freedom of expression, universal access to information, access to quality education, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity of content. Since these are central to UNESCO's mandate in education, science, culture, communication and information. One main activity has been the ongoing implementation of the Memory of the World Programme to ensure the protection of documentary heritage and to encourage broader access to local content. Another concerns the Information for All Programme (IFAP) whose objectives, activities and modalities are similar to WSIS. IFAP has funded a global scaled-up project on information literacy in the form of regional training-the-trainers workshops and regional infoethics workshops; IFAP is also contributing partial funding for a pilot project for the establishment of an open source archival repository and

preservation system that would result in a cheap, effective, easily migratable system.

E-learning is fundamental to development, and the process of acquiring knowledge and skills through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) becomes increasingly important in emerging knowledge societies where it is a critical tool to improve both access to, and the quality of, education. UNESCO supported e-learning initiatives in all regions for both formal and non-formal education, including the publication of its ICT Competency Framework for Teachers which defines the range of skills needed for teachers to effectively integrate ICTs in teaching/learning processes. The project benefited from close multistakeholder collaboration between UNESCO, IT industry leaders and educational institutions. Another major activity was the launch of an online collaborative knowledge hub of training and capacity-building resources for development to provide a directory of resources needed for local development and poverty reduction. The Open Training Platform gives access to 1,700 free training resources from over 630 development stakeholders including all UN agencies.

In the Action Line on *Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content*, sub-themes have been identified for memory and heritage, local content and contemporary cultural expressions, linguistic diversity and people

with disabilities. One of the major activities has been the agreement between UNESCO and the US Library of Congress to build a World Digital Library of unique or rare materials from libraries and other institutions and made available free of charge on the Internet. A prototype functioning in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish, and Portuguese was demonstrated at the signing of the Agreement in October 2007 and a public launch is planned for April 2009.

A survey to gather information on motivation, priority action areas, partnerships, and coordination mechanisms under this Action Line found, as a source of concern, the absence of the private sector as well as small and medium sized enterprises. Their role consequently needs to be enhanced and promoted.

The establishment of indicators for media development was a significant contribution to WSIS Action Line *Media* which also recognized Community Media Centres (CMCs) as a cost effective model combining new and old ICTs. Their introduction in 25 countries through 130 pilot projects contributed to training nearly 1,500 community media workers in development on local content.

Finally, in the Action Line on *Ethical dimensions of the Information Society* in 2007, UNESCO initiated a series of regional conferences enabling specialists

and decision-makers to debate the ethical dimensions of the Information society. The main goal of these regional conferences (held in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Europe and Asia and the Pacific) was to stimulate reflection on the ethical, legal and societal aspects of the information society by bringing together representatives of a wide range of environments to contribute to the UNESCO Draft Code of Ethics initiative.

At the 2nd Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in November 2007, UNESCO, in association with representatives of ITU and ICANN, announced the commitment to developing a set of universal standards aimed at facilitating the creation of multilingual knowledge repositories and enhancing access to them. In cooperation with the Council of Europe and the OSCE, UNESCO organized a workshop on protecting freedom of expression and security on the Internet, discussing mechanisms that influence freedom of expression in cyberspace in both developed and developing countries. Participants agreed that industry's Internet content management should comply fully with human rights standards, particularly concerning the right to freedom of expression and information regardless of frontiers.

Despite the open multistakeholder process undertaken to establish terms of reference and work methods for Action Line implementation, participation and inclusion of new stakeholders remains low, and is the main obstacle for effective

WSIS follow-up. UNESCO is studying solutions to increase participation and overcome issues of representativeness and legitimacy that impinge on multistakeholder cooperation.

The wide-ranging structure of Action Line implementation itself is also proving to be a challenge to coherent efforts to narrow scope and define issues. Subgrouping efforts under each Action Line to better involve stakeholders, UNESCO continues its engagement as a how lead player in maintaining participation and sustaining implementation including initial technical difficulties have been solved and the new strategies involve collaboration with the open source community for the launch of the platform in 2008.

Additionally, the annual drop in participation in the Geneva meetings, partly due to the high costs of travel, needs to be addressed to find a better way to connect among the stakeholders and to form or strengthen partnerships for implementing the action lines. Almost three years after the conclusion of the Summit, all participants at the May 2008 WSIS meetings, including UN agencies and non-governmental organizations, agreed that a change in the facilitation process is needed. Possible solutions include a compressed meeting week, more participation workshop planned by the stakeholders, improved Web presence and reporting mechanisms. UNESCO itself will focus future consultations on

specific issues for each action lines through concrete projects and promotion of new partnerships.

In conclusion, while several activities are progressing well, a number of unforeseen difficulties have given rise to complications. Greater coordination among the leading facilitator agencies, with a sharper definition of roles, especially in reaching coherent measuring tools to assess progress, is necessary. The proposals currently under examination to address concerns should result in achieving the planned outcomes.