WSIS (+10) – What ccTLDs need to know

August 2015

What is WSIS?

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) refers to a UN summit originating from an ITU resolution of 1998 that recognised the importance of ICT in bridging the global development divide. It took place in two phases (2003 in Geneva and 2005 in Tunis) and focussed on ICT challenges, such as the "digital divide".

What was the outcome?

The summit(s) produced four main (non-binding) documents, which, inter alia, linked the process to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and recognised the role, not only of governments, but also of the private sector, civil society and international/regional institutions - thereby introducing a stakeholder-component in the process.

- **Geneva Declaration of Principles**: Key principles of an "Internet Society for All" outlining, inter alia, the role of governments and stakeholders (a nascent reference to 'multistakeholderism' in para 48-50), the need for access to and accessibility of affordable ICT; confidence and security enhancing measures; a sound and clear policy, legal and regulatory framework.
- **Geneva Plan of Action**: 11 action lines to put flesh on the Declaration's bones; mandating a Working Group (WGIG) to come up with a working definition of "Internet Governance" and to identify relevant public policy issues (which the group eventually did in its report, para 10 and 13-27).
- **Tunis Commitment**: Reaffirming previous commitments and introducing new commitments; recognising the benefits of cooperating with other stakeholders.
- **Tunis Agenda**: Implementation mechanism for the action 11 lines;
  - Established the **Internet Governance Forum** (as non-decision-making body);
  - Introduced the concept of "**enhanced cooperation**" (whether it refers to 'governments-only' or 'governments + stakeholders' remains contentious till today);
  - Called for "**financial mechanisms**" to enhance ICT deployment (which failed);
  - Called for a 10-year review by UNGA (UN General Assembly).

Why is WSIS (in general) important to ccTLDs?

Mainly because of the **issues** identified as IG-relevant (e.g. in the WGIG report, Tunis agenda) and hence discussed at the various meeting. They point to where governments put priorities in ICT and how they see their own role (powers) and that of other stakeholders. Issues addressed include, inter alia:

Infrastructure and management of critical internet resources, internet governance, administration of the root zone files and system, data protection, privacy, spam, network security and cybercrime, intellectual property rights, local content, IDN, the role of ICT infrastructure providers, etc., and also mention the government-ccTLD relationship (mainly not to mess with other countries' decisions) and the need for public policies regarding gTLDs, etc.

What is WSIS+10?

It is a review process, which was recommended by the WSIS summit(s), entailed a series of reviews (UNESCO 2013, CSTD May 2015, ITU June 2015) and is set to culminate in the high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), 15-16 December in New York. Important issues on the agenda:

- Renewal of the IGF mandate (which will run out this year): will reveal how the intergovernmental assembly perceives the value of the (multi-)stakeholder approach in implementing WSIS action lines and contributing to achieving the MDGs
- (likely) A recognition of the need (or value) of cooperating with stakeholders in, e.g. the fight against cybercrime. It will be interesting to see how fundamental rights such as privacy, freedom of expression, etc. will weigh against the need for security.

What will happen till December 2015?

Obviously the stocktaking exercise of what has been achieved so far and where the gaps are, started a while ago. As the process (→ timeline) nears its peak, information, meetings, documents and position papers multiply. Here some (!) milestones:

- **End of August**: publication of a non-paper (summarising individual stakeholder perspectives on progress made in implementing WSIS outcomes, ICT gaps, areas of improvement), launch of 2-week comment period; planned to be basis of final outcome document.
- **24-27 September 2015**: UN summit to adopt sustainable development goals (SDG), which replace/build upon the MDGs, as they expire in 2015; this will impact outcomes of WSIS+10 (→ text to be adopted: 17 goals with 169 associated targets, e.g. 9.c stating "provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020").
- **19 October 2015** (tbc): Informal Interactive WSIS Stakeholder Consultations (parallel to ICANN Dublin).
- **20-22 October 2015:** 2nd intergovernmental prep meeting (some governments allowing non-governmental stakeholders on their delegations).
- **10-13 November 2015**: Internet Governance Forum, Brazil (likely to produce output to be fed into UNGA preparatory process).
- **15-16 December 2015**: UNGA High-level meeting on WSIS+10 Overall Review, publication of final outcome document; decides on the future (or not) of IGF.

How can you get involved?

- The WSIS process (and the UN-led activities around it, e.g. WSIS Forum, CSTD) have a stakeholder-component in them. Yet note that in the run-up to the UNGA High Level meeting, only "accredited stakeholders" can contribute (those who have participated in past WSIS-related meetings) – a clear disadvantage for newcomers.
- CENTR or CENTR members alone cannot contribute (unless they have participated in past WSIS-related meetings), yet have a vehicle either through the I* Group or through their government representatives by joining their delegations (NB: these may differ from the ones you are usually dealing with, e.g. GAC).

Please also refer to: CENTR Paper "A primer for ccTLDs on Internet governance and the ITU"
https://centr.org/news/06-16-2014/3545/centr-paper-primer-cctlds-internet-governance-and-itu