

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2007

*Focus on Participation*



# Global Information Society Watch

## 2007



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# International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

Don MacLean

## Introduction

### *Objectives and main activities*

The overall objectives of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) are to promote the development of telecommunication networks and access to telecommunication services by fostering cooperation among governments and a range of non-governmental actors that includes network operators, service providers, equipment manufacturers, scientific and technical organisations, financial organisations and development organisations.

The ITU's main activities include:

- Standardising telecommunications technologies, services and operations, including tariffs and numbering plans.
- Allocating radio frequency bands to different services and coordinating and registering frequency assignments and satellite orbital positions so as to avoid harmful interference.
- Promoting the development of telecommunications infrastructure and services, regulatory institutions, and human resources in developing countries.
- Providing information on global telecommunications trends and developments.

### *Legal/constitutional composition*

The ITU is founded on a set of treaties dating back to 1865 that have binding force in international law – the ITU Constitution and Convention, the Radio Regulations, and the International Telecommunication Regulations – as well as resolutions, recommendations and other non-binding instruments adopted by its conferences.<sup>1</sup>

Although it is an intergovernmental organisation, a large number of private sector entities and other non-governmental actors are members of the ITU and participate in its work. This is a longstanding arrangement that reflects the important role non-governmental actors have played since the days of the telegraph in developing telecommunications technologies, networks and services. The current ITU Constitution provides for three distinct classes of membership – member states, sector members, and associates – with differing rights and obligations.

The ITU is organised into three sectors – Radiocommunication, Telecommunication Standardisation and Telecommunication Development – known respectively as ITU-R, ITU-T and ITU-D. Much of the substantive work of the ITU is done by its members in sector meetings with administrative support from the three sector bureaux: the Radiocommunication Bureau (BR), Telecommunication Standardisation Bureau (TSB) and Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT). Each bureau is headed by a director.

<b>WEBSITE:</b> <a href="http://www.itu.int">www.itu.int</a>
<b>HEADQUARTERS:</b> Geneva, Switzerland
<b>FOUNDED:</b> 1865
<b>UN STATUS:</b> UN specialized agency since 1947
<b>TYPE:</b> Intergovernmental organisation (191 member states) with non-governmental members (over 600 sector members and 130 associates)

The ITU General Secretariat provides common services to support the activities of the sectors. It also organises world and regional TELECOM exhibitions and forums as well as smaller scale seminars and workshops, and publishes reports on trends, developments and emerging issues. It is headed by a secretary-general who is responsible for the overall management of the ITU and is assisted by a deputy secretary-general.

ITU activities are funded mainly through a “free choice” system in which member states and sector members select the number of contributory units they wish to pay from a sliding scale that ranges from 40 units at the top end to one sixteenth of a unit at the bottom. Because they do not have the same rights as member states, most notably the right to vote, the value of a sector member unit is only a fraction of the value of a member state unit (currently one fifth). The fees paid by associates in turn are fractions of the value of a sector member unit, reflecting their more limited rights to participate in ITU activities.<sup>2</sup>

The monetary value of the contributory unit is adjusted every two years as part of the ITU budget process. The values of member state and sector member contributory units currently stand at CHF 318,000 (USD 260,627) and CHF 63,600 (USD 52,125) respectively. The fees charged to associates range between CHF 1,987.50 (USD 1,628) and CHF 10,600 (USD 8,687), depending on the sector with which they are associated and the countries from which they come.

In addition to membership fees, the ITU derives significant revenues from the sale of publications and other cost recovery activities. These activities currently account for about 15% of total revenues.

### *Key members/participants and decision-making structures*

The ITU membership currently includes 191 member states that have the right to take part in all activities, 643 sector members that have the right to take part in all the activities of the sector(s) to which they

<sup>1</sup> More information is available at the ITU web site.

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of restrictions built into the “free choice” system. For member states, only least-developed countries (LDCs) can contribute at the one-sixteenth unit level. Sector members of the Radiocommunication and Telecommunication Standardisation sectors must contribute at least one half a unit, while Telecommunication Development sector members can choose to contribute at the one-quarter, one-eighth or one-sixteenth unit level. The fees for associates also differ by sector, being one sixth of a sector member unit in the Radiocommunication and Standardisation sectors, one twentieth in the Development Sector, and one fortieth for LDCs. For further details see: <[www.itu.int/members/pdf/membership.pdf](http://www.itu.int/members/pdf/membership.pdf)>.

belong, and 132 associates that have the right to take part in some activities of the sector(s) with which they are associated (e.g. the meetings of an individual study group).<sup>3</sup>

Overall governance is provided by the Plenipotentiary Conference, which meets every four years to amend the ITU Constitution and Convention, approve strategic and financial plans, adopt policies that may apply to the organisation as a whole or to one or more specific sectors, and elect the secretary-general, the deputy secretary-general and the directors of the three bureaus. The Plenipotentiary Conference also elects the twelve members of the Radio Regulations Board, a part-time body that oversees the operations of the BR on behalf of the member states.

In addition to these officials, the Plenipotentiary Conference elects countries to serve on the ITU Council. This body meets annually and is empowered to govern between Plenipotentiary Conferences. It is composed of one quarter of the ITU state membership (currently 46 members) and elections are structured to ensure that the five ITU administrative regions are fairly represented in terms of the number of member states in each region.

Each ITU sector has its own governance structure composed of:

- Periodic assemblies (in ITU-R and ITU-T) or conferences (in ITU-D) that provide overall direction to sectoral activities
- Advisory boards drawn from the membership that guide sectoral activities in the period between conferences
- Study groups that examine issues and develop recommendations in specific subject areas.

The World Telecommunication Standardisation Assembly and the World Telecommunication Development Conference meet every four years to plan sectoral work, as well as to elect advisory group and study group chairs and vice-chairs.

The Radiocommunication Assembly, the equivalent body in ITU-R, meets every three to four years in conjunction with the Radiocommunication Conference, a treaty-making event which has the power to amend the Radio Regulations.

The ITU Constitution provides for one other governance structure: the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT), a treaty-making event that has the power to amend the International Telecommunication Regulations (ITRs).<sup>4</sup>

3 Membership information retrieved in October 2006. For lists of ITU members see: <[www.itu.int/GlobalDirectory](http://www.itu.int/GlobalDirectory)>.

4 The ITRs were last amended in 1988, at a time when telecommunications was beginning to be transformed by the privatisation of state-owned operators and the introduction of competition in both domestic and international markets. These trends have gathered strength in the past two decades, during which time the internet and convergence have also helped transform telecommunications worldwide, rendering the ITRs increasingly obsolete. ITU members have long recognised that the ITRs no longer reflect the realities of international telecommunications. However, successive reviews over the past dozen years have been unable to achieve consensus on what action should be taken. The 2006 Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference agreed to launch a new review process to be completed by the time of the next plenipotentiary conference in 2010, and to convene a WCIT in 2012 to consider the results of this review.

### *Relations with other international institutions and the multilateral system*

The ITU has been a specialised agency of the United Nations since 1947. From an administrative point of view, it is part of the UN “common system” of administrative regulations, rules and procedures that governs the terms and conditions of employment of ITU staff and elected officials and also sets general policies and standards for financial, human resources and information systems management.

The UN and other specialised agencies have the right to attend ITU conferences as observers. Some UN agencies take an active interest in the work of the ITU either because their constituencies are major users of telecommunications – e.g. the International Civil Aviation Organisation, the International Maritime Organisation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) – or because of a shared interest in development – e.g. the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In addition to these links with the UN system, the ITU has close relations with the 79 intergovernmental and non-governmental international and regional organisations, 11 regional intergovernmental telecommunications organisations and 5 intergovernmental organisations operating satellite systems that take part in its work as sector members.

As a result of the important roles they have played in driving telecommunications liberalisation over the past ten to fifteen years, the ITU has attempted to develop strong relations with the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

### *Commitment to development*

The 1984 report of the ITU Independent Commission for World Wide Telecommunication Development, popularly known as the Maitland Commission after its chairman, highlighted the “missing link” in developing countries and internationally between the development of telecommunications and overall economic and social development (ITU, 1984).

As a result of this report and as part of a comprehensive reform effort that began in the late 1980s in response to changes that were taking place in the telecommunications environment (i.e. privatisation, liberalisation, competition), the ITU upgraded its commitment to development in 1992 when it established ITU-D.

About 25% of the ITU budget is allocated to ITU-D (vs. about 35% to ITU-R, 18% to ITU-T and 21% to the General Secretariat).

In addition, there is a constitutional obligation for the directors of the radiocommunication and standardisation bureaus to provide technical support to the development sector. This is typically done through workshops and seminars to help build developing country capacity in relation to ITU-R and ITU-T activities.

### *Commitment to gender equality*

The 2002 Marrakech Plenipotentiary Conference adopted Resolution 70, “Gender Mainstreaming in ITU” (ITU, 2002), which called on member states and sector members to promote gender equality in their activities; resolved to improve socioeconomic conditions for women,

particularly in developing countries, by mainstreaming the gender perspective in telecoms development programmes; and to incorporate the gender perspective in the ITU strategic plan and the operational plans of the sectors.

The 2006 Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference updated this resolution to take account of developments inside and outside the ITU since 2002, particularly the results of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the 2006 Doha World Telecommunication Development Conference.<sup>5</sup> In renewing Resolution 70, the Antalya Conference adopted the broader goal of “promoting gender equality towards all-inclusive information societies” in addition to gender mainstreaming in the ITU. The Conference also amended the ITU Constitution and Convention to indicate that their language should be considered as gender neutral.

The revised resolution tasks the Council with accelerating gender mainstreaming activities. It instructs the secretary-general to ensure that the gender perspective is incorporated in the work programmes, management approaches and human resource development activities of the ITU, and to report annually to the Council on progress made.

### *Southern actors and civil society participation*

Virtually all developing countries are members of the ITU. Like developed countries, each of them is represented in the ITU by their telecommunication administration, i.e. the government department or agency responsible for international telecommunication policy.

A significant number of non-governmental entities and organisations from developing countries and regions are ITU sector members. Some 548 of the ITU's 643 sector members are national entities. Under the membership structure set out in the ITU Constitution and Convention, these entities are classed as recognised operating agencies (ROAs), scientific and industrial organisations (SIOs), or financial and development institutions.

These 548 national entities come from 110 different countries. Slightly more than half of them are from non-OECD countries. The 229 ITU sector members that come from these 90 developing countries include 48 sector members from South and East Asia, 46 from sub-Saharan Africa, 39 from North Africa, 37 from the Near and Middle East, 17 from Eastern Europe, 17 from South America, 11 from Central America and the Caribbean, and 6 from Central Asia.

Of the 229 developing country sector members, 126 are only members of the development sector. The other 103 are members of the radiocommunication and/or standardisation sectors as well. The developing country members of these two sectors are drawn from 51 different non-OECD countries.

In addition to national entities, ITU sector membership includes 79 regional and other international organisations (REINTORGS), 11 regional telecommunications organisations (REGORGS), and five

intergovernmental organisations operating satellite systems (SATORGS). Of these, 28 REGINTORGS, 9 REGORGS, and 3 SATORGS represent regions that are exclusively or largely composed of developing countries.

There are currently 132 associate members of the ITU – 123 national entities, of which 7 are based in developing countries, and 9 regional and other international organisations, of which 2 are based in largely developing regions.

Because the ITU membership structure does not include a class of civil society entities and organisations<sup>6</sup> – and in the absence of a generally agreed definition of “civil society” – it is difficult to be precise about the extent to which civil society entities and organisations participate in the work of the ITU, either as sector members or as associates.

If civil society is broadly defined to include not-for-profit scientific and technical organisations, as well as organisations representing non-business users of telecommunication services and/or communities, a significant proportion of the ITU's regional and other international organisation membership could be considered to be part of civil society. However, if not-for-profit scientific and technical organisations are excluded from the definition of civil society, there currently is very little civil society participation in the ITU.

## **Role and responsibilities in ICTs**

### *General orientation*

As a technical organisation, the ITU's general orientation is to promoting the development of telecommunications technologies and access to networks and services. This involves it in a wide range of issues related to scientific research, experimental development, equipment manufacturing, software engineering, network planning, infrastructure deployment, service provisioning, interconnection, charging and revenue sharing, information and network security, human resource development, telecommunications industry financing, and regulation.

Although there is a high degree of correlation between the development of telecommunications and overall economic and social development, the ITU's primary orientation is to “the development of telecommunications” – including infrastructure, services, applications and regulatory arrangements – rather than to “telecommunications for development”.

### *Responsibilities in relation to the WSIS*

On the basis of a proposal from Tunisia, the 1998 ITU Minneapolis Plenipotentiary Conference adopted a resolution that called on the United Nations to hold a World Summit on the Information Society. It instructed the ITU secretary-general to pursue the matter with the UN

5 More information about both the WSIS and the 2006 Doha Conference is available from: <[www.itu.int/wsiss](http://www.itu.int/wsiss)> and <[www.itu.int/ITU-D/wtdc06](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/wtdc06)>.

6 The ITU has never implemented ECOSOC Resolution 1296, adopted in May 1968 (or later revision), concerning recognition of NGOs, although there was an effort by NGOs themselves to gain recognition about a decade ago. See: <[www.comunica.org/itu\\_ngo](http://www.comunica.org/itu_ngo)>.

secretary-general and the executive heads of other UN agencies and programmes, whose activities are coordinated through the body now known as the UN Chief Executives Board (CEB).<sup>7</sup>

The proposal was enthusiastically received when it was presented to this body in the spring of 1999. The secretary-general proceeded to develop a plan that involved holding the summit in two phases – the first in Geneva in 2003 and the second in Tunis in 2005. This plan was approved by the ITU Council and subsequently endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2001. The General Assembly asked the ITU secretary-general to take lead responsibility for managing the summit process in conjunction with other interested agencies.

The ITU secretary-general served as WSIS secretary-general and chaired the High-Level Summit Organising Committee. Within the ITU, the General Secretariat's Strategic Planning and External Affairs Units provided core support for the substantive and procedural aspects of the WSIS process with assistance from the sectoral bureaus, particularly the BDT. The ITU's internal resources were augmented by contributions from some ITU member states and sector members, as well as the Canton of Geneva.

The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society included separate follow-up frameworks for ICT financial mechanisms, internet governance, and the eleven action lines contained in the agenda.

With respect to the action lines, the Tunis Agenda asked the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to monitor implementation on behalf of the General Assembly. It also asked the CEB to set up a United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) to coordinate the activities of UN departments and agencies. This group has been established and is currently chaired by the ITU secretary-general.

The Tunis Agenda identified organisations to moderate and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships in relation to each one of the eleven action lines. It tasked the ITU with this responsibility for action line C2: Information and communication infrastructure, and action line C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs. In addition, it asked the ITU to lead in coordinating the facilitation process, along with UNESCO and the UNDP.

Between the first and second phases of the Summit, the ITU conducted a stocktaking exercise which resulted in an extensive inventory of stakeholder activities related to the Geneva Plan of Action, which is structurally similar to the Tunis Agenda. Following the second phase of the Summit, the ITU updated this inventory, which now includes more than 3,000 activities, and also compiled a Golden Book of new commitments made at the Tunis phase.

## Description and analysis of ICT activities

### *Activities in relation to the WSIS*

The ITU undertook a number of activities specifically related to the WSIS in 2006.

The ITU secretary-general has taken the lead within the UN system in facilitating and coordinating WSIS follow-up activities. As mentioned above, the ITU secretary-general currently chairs the United Nations Group on the Information Society. The ITU website is the repository for the WSIS documents and for information regarding WSIS follow-up. In addition, the secretary-general has launched a "Connect the World" initiative – an ambitious effort involving partners from industry, government, international organisations and civil society to bridge the "digital divide" and connect the unconnected by creating an enabling environment, developing infrastructure, and promoting applications.

The ITU-D World Telecommunication Development Conference that took place in the Doha, Qatar in March 2006 adopted the Doha Declaration and the Doha Action Plan (ITU, 2006a) – documents that set out the policy agenda and work programme for ITU-D for the next four years.

These two documents seek to position ITU-D as a key player in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes, particularly in areas that fall within the "core competencies" of the ITU, which are identified as including assistance in bridging the "digital divide", international and regional cooperation, radio spectrum management, standards development, and dissemination of information. They enjoin ITU members to engage in implementation of the WSIS outcomes, including the eleven action lines set out in the Annex to the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, particularly those in which the ITU has been given lead coordination and facilitation responsibilities.

More concretely, the Doha Action Plan sets out:

- Six programmes (regulatory reform, technologies and telecommunications network development, e-strategies and e-services/applications, economics and finance, human capacity building, and a special programme for the LDCs).
- Two activities (statistics and information on telecommunication, partnerships and promotion).
- Special and regional initiatives.

The plan contains a table cross-referencing all of these programmes and activities to the eleven action lines in the Tunis Agenda. However, it acknowledges that more than a simple cross-referencing of activities may need to be done to strengthen the links between the ITU's efforts to develop telecommunications and the WSIS plan to use telecommunications and other ICTs more effectively for development. It notes that "ITU-D functions may be reviewed taking into account WSIS outcomes."

In May 2006, in collaboration with the Korea Agency for Digital Opportunity and Promotion (KADO)<sup>8</sup> and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD),<sup>9</sup> the ITU Strategy and Policy Unit published the *World Information Society Report 2006* (ITU, 2006b). The general purpose of this report is to measure worldwide

7 At the time, this body was known as the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

8 <[www.kado.or.kr](http://www.kado.or.kr)>.

9 <[unctad.org](http://unctad.org)>.

progress towards the information society, and in particular to chart progress towards the implementation of WSIS outcomes. To do this, the report's authors have developed a Digital Opportunity Index (DOI)<sup>10</sup> – a composite index composed of eleven indicators that measure opportunity (i.e. availability and cost of internet and ICT access networks), infrastructure (i.e. uptake of internet and ICT access technologies by households and individuals), and utilisation (i.e. the use made of these technologies for internet and ICT access as a proportion of total telecommunications use). The report uses the DOI to compare progress towards the information society in different countries and regions, as well as to identify different strategies and policy options.

In November 2006, the Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference adopted a resolution on "ITU's role in implementing the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society". This resolution instructs the secretary-general to:

- Take all necessary measures for the ITU to play a leading facilitating role in the overall WSIS implementation process, along with UNESCO and the UNDP.
- Lead in facilitating the implementation of the WSIS action lines relating to infrastructure development (C2) and cybersecurity (C5).
- Participate in the implementation of other action lines that fall within the ITU's mandate (essentially all the other action lines except those dealing with cultural and linguistic diversity, local content, media, and the ethical dimensions of the information society).
- Ensure that all of this is done in cooperation with other bodies involved in WSIS follow-up, in a coordinated fashion.

The resolution also instructs the directors of the three bureaux to support WSIS follow-up activities.

The ITU Council will receive annual progress reports from the Secretariat and will maintain the Working Group on the World Summit on the Information Society (WG-WSIS) that was set up during the summit process to provide ongoing guidance to follow-up activities.

### *Other ICT-related activities*

As well as adopting a general resolution on the ITU's overall role in WSIS implementation, the Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference adopted a number of resolutions that address aspects of internet governance – one of the main topics of the Tunis phase of the Summit and a key area of WSIS follow-up that is of particular concern to developing countries and civil society.

- In recognition of the convergence that is taking place between telecommunications and the internet, particularly through the development of voice over internet protocol services (VoIP) and next generation networks (NGNs), Resolution 101 on "Internet-Protocol-based networks" resolves that the ITU shall clearly identify the range of internet-related issues that fall within its respon-

sibility, collaborate with other relevant organisations to maximise benefits of IP-based networks, and continue to study international internet connectivity as an urgent matter, as called for in the Tunis Agenda.

- More specifically in relation to the results of the WSIS, Resolution 102 on "ITU's role with regard to international public policy issues pertaining to the internet and the management of internet resources, including domain names and addresses" instructs the secretary-general to continue to take a significant role in international discussions and initiatives related to the management of internet names, addresses and other resources, and to take the steps necessary for the ITU to continue to play a facilitating role in the coordination of international public policy issues pertaining to the internet, as expressed in the Tunis Agenda. The resolution also instructs the directors of the standardisation and development bureaux to support these actions.
- Resolution 133 on the "Role of administrations of Member States in the management of internationalised (multilingual) domain names" instructs the secretary-general and the directors of the bureaux to take an active part in all international discussions, initiatives and activities on the deployment and management of internationalised domain names, in cooperation with relevant organisations.
- The Antalya Conference also updated Resolution 130 on "Strengthening the role of ITU in building confidence and security in the use of information technologies" to reflect the priority that the WSIS gave to this issue and the ITU's leadership role in the implementation of WSIS action line C5.

In addition to these resolutions on internet governance, the Antalya Conference adopted a number of other resolutions on ICTs and development, including resolutions on:

- Special measures for the least developed countries and small island developing states
- Assistance and support to countries in special need for rebuilding their telecommunications sector
- ICTs in the service of humanitarian assistance
- Support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)
- Support for the Agenda for Connectivity in the Americas and Quito Action Plan
- Next generation network deployment in developing countries.

Ten days after the close of the Antalya Conference, ITU TELECOM WORLD 2006 opened in Hong Kong.<sup>11</sup> ITU world and regional TELECOM events combine exhibitions that showcase that latest ICT technologies with forums that feature high-level speakers and panelists from the private and public sectors. Under the overall theme of

<sup>10</sup> More information is available from: <[www.itu.int/doi](http://www.itu.int/doi)>.

<sup>11</sup> <[www.world2006.hk/en](http://www.world2006.hk/en)>.



“Living in the Digital World”, the 2006 TELECOM world forum explored three domains: “digital lifestyle” (how current and future lifestyles are shaped by ICTs); “digital ecosystems” (how different kinds of companies interlink, cooperate and compete); and “digital society” (the challenges in maintaining a transparent regulatory environment and building an information society for all).

Because they are market-oriented events, TELECOMs provide an interesting point of comparison for other ITU activities, such as the Doha World Telecommunication Development Conference and the Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference, in terms of participants and programmes. Although there are echoes of WSIS in the TELECOM WORLD 2006 forum programme and some developing country speakers in the digital society domain, the almost complete absence of developing country keynote speakers and panellists in the sessions on digital ecosystems and digital lifestyles reflects the very great differences of capacity that currently exist among countries and regions and the magnitude of the ICTs-for-development challenge.

## Stakeholder participation

### *Key areas in which participation of civil society, Southern countries and women is an issue*

In 2002, the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation and Panos London published *Louder Voices* (MacLean *et al.*, 2002), a study of developing country participation in international ICT decision-making. This study noted that it is important to distinguish between the presence of developing countries, civil society, and women in international ICT decision-making forums on the one hand, and their effective participation on the other. The ITU, which was the subject of a *Louder Voices* institutional study, is a case in point.

Developing countries are present at many ITU meetings. They tend to be most strongly represented at the major conferences and assemblies, including those of the radiocommunication and standardisation sectors, and are well represented in all the activities of the development sector. However, presence does not equate to effective participation, which – as *Louder Voices* pointed out – requires capacities to forecast issues, conduct research, set agendas, coordinate action at national and regional levels, negotiate successfully before and during events, implement decisions, and evaluate results.

The situation regarding developing country participation is especially challenging in meetings dealing with technical matters. This is particularly the case in the standardisation sector where, with the exception of the study groups dealing with numbering and tariff questions, the work is done almost exclusively by representatives of sector members. Without the technical and financial capacities required to contribute to this work, or at least follow its development, there is little reason to be present. Many developing countries are therefore effectively excluded from some of the ITU’s most important work. As indicated in the section on Southern partners and civil society participation, at present there are no radiocommunication or standardisation sector members from 110 of the ITU’s 191 member states – and all 110 are developing countries.<sup>12</sup>

Civil society faces three main issues in seeking to participate in the work of the ITU: the ITU’s membership structure, which has been described above; the cost of meeting attendance; and the ITU’s working methods, which require its members to have significant technical capacities in order to contribute effectively to decision-making in many areas of activity.

In principle, ITU sector membership is open to both national and international civil society organisations. However, the requirement for all national entities and some kinds of regional and international organisations seeking sector membership to be approved by the governments of the countries where they are based, or alternatively by the ITU Council, may pose obstacles in some cases. The requirement to make financial contributions either as full sector members or as associates is an additional obstacle. Finally, the cost of attending the meetings where ITU members do their work and, in the case of the radiocommunication and standardisation sectors, the technical expertise required to contribute meaningfully to the work of the ITU may pose additional problems.

For civil society organisations, the work of the development sector is likely to be of most interest, and the one to which they can contribute most effectively. Financial barriers to ITU-D participation are also lower than in the other sectors.

In ITU-D, sector members can pay one eighth of a sector member unit – CHF 7,950 (USD 6,515) at current values – while sector members from LDCs are only obliged to contribute one sixteenth of a sector member unit, or CHF 3,975 (USD 3,257). ITU-D associates pay one twentieth of a sector member unit, CHF 3,180 (2,606), unless they are from LDCs, in which case they pay one fortieth, or CHF 1,590 (USD 1,303).

In ITU-R and ITU-T on the other hand, sector members must contribute at least one half a sector member unit as an annual membership fee – CHF 31,800 (USD 26,061) at current values. Associate status in these sectors may be a more attractive option than full sector membership, although the cost, CHF 10,600 (USD 8,688) in annual fees, may be prohibitive.

In addition to the cost of sector membership or associate status, the cost of ITU publications and the restrictions the ITU places on online access to some information resources, such as conference documents, may also constitute significant barriers to civil society engagement with ITU activities. Although ITU membership includes certain privileges, such as a 15% discount on the price of hard copy publications, the value of these benefits in relation to their cost is unlikely to stimulate interest in sector membership or associate status among civil society organisations, which would need to pay thousands of Swiss francs annually in fees to save hundreds on the price of publications.

The WSIS process appears to have sensitised member states to the advantages of involving civil society in the work of the ITU – or at

12 On the positive side, however, the fact that about 20% of the national members of the radiocommunication and standardisation sectors come from non-OECD countries may indicate that developing countries and regions that are in transition and/or have begun to develop requisite technical capacities are becoming increasingly engaged in the work of these sectors. A longitudinal study would be required to confirm whether this is in fact the case.

least in activities related to WSIS follow-up. While recognising the key role played by civil society entities and organisations in building the global information society, ITU member states are also concerned about the potential impact of greater civil society involvement on the intergovernmental character of the ITU, its current membership structure, and its finances.

The level of participation by women in the work of the ITU generally reflects their participation in international telecommunications policy-making in national governments, as well as their participation in the non-governmental entities and organisations that do much of the technical work of the ITU.

Although women from both developing and developed countries have assumed important leadership roles in the work of the ITU in recent years (e.g. as chairpersons of Council and Radiocommunication conferences), and although they are invariably present in at least limited numbers on the delegations of governments and sector members to ITU meetings, ITU events often have the appearance of being meetings of an “old boys club”.

The current under-representation of women in the scientific and engineering professions that do much of the technical work of the ITU clearly limits the possibilities for greater gender balance in many forums. The development sector may be more fertile ground for increasing participation by women, particularly if it becomes less technical in its orientation and more closely attuned to the development mainstream.

### *Actions taken to ensure effective participation*

In order to promote greater developing country participation in the technical work of the ITU, the Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference adopted Resolution 123 on “Bridging the standardisation gap between developing and developed countries”. This resolution recognises that developing countries require a certain level of technical capacity in order to be able to apply ITU-R and ITU-T standards, quite apart from the capacity required to contribute to their development. It invites member states and sector members to contribute to a fund that would help bridge the standardisation gap and to otherwise support actions taken by the secretary-general and the directors to this end.

With respect to civil society participation, the Antalya Conference adopted a resolution concerning “Study of the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the activities of the Union related to the World Summit on the Information Society” (ITU, 2006c). This resolution instructs the Council to set up a working group, open to all ITU member states, to undertake consultations and prepare a final report, well in advance of the next plenipotentiary conference in 2010. The terms of reference of this working group include:

- Establishing a set of criteria for defining which stakeholders are relevant to participate in ITU activities related to the WSIS.
- Analysing the definitions of sector member and associate and the related provisions of the legal instruments of the ITU and how they could be amended as necessary and applied to enhance ITU membership.

- Reviewing existing mechanisms – such as partnerships, symposiums, seminars, workshops, focus groups, policy forums and experts – in order to consider how they could be used more effectively and to identify possible new mechanisms to broaden participation.
- Identifying efforts that may be needed to mobilise and ensure the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders from developing countries, as well as other stakeholders in the development field.
- Drafting possible amendments to the ITU Constitution and Convention in order to facilitate participation by relevant stakeholders.
- Identifying the spheres of competence that member states reserve for themselves with respect to WSIS stakeholders.
- Considering the financial obligations and consequences arising from broader participation of relevant stakeholders in ITU’s WSIS-related activities.

Nothing is included, however, on the need to bring ITU into line with ECOSOC resolutions concerning the participation of NGOs, and the modalities that apply across the UN system.

Insofar as *participation by women* is concerned, as mentioned earlier, the Antalya Conference adopted Resolution 70 on “Gender mainstreaming in ITU and promotion of gender equality towards all-inclusive information societies”. As well as instructing the secretary-general to pursue gender mainstreaming policies and practices within the ITU Secretariat, this resolution encourages member states and sector members to review their own policies and practices to ensure that recruitment, employment, training and advancement of women and men are undertaken on a fair and equitable basis, and to facilitate the employment of women and men equally in the telecommunications field.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

### *General conclusions*

The *Louder Voices* report made a number of recommendations concerning the actions that international ICT decision-making bodies could take to enhance participation by developing country stakeholders, including governments, the private sector and civil society. These included actions to increase:

- Awareness of issues
- Access to information
- Transparency of proceedings
- Participation by different stakeholders
- Capacity-building.

In the four years that have passed since *Louder Voices* was published, and at least partly as a result of the WSIS, the ITU has improved its performance in a number of these areas.

The WSIS process, which was originated and spearheaded by the ITU, succeeded in *raising awareness* among developing country decision-makers of the links between ICTs and development, as well as the importance of developing sound national ICT policies and participating effectively in international ICT forums.

The ITU Secretariat – particularly the Strategy and Policy Unit (SPU) in the secretary-general's office and the BDT – has contributed to raising awareness and to improving *access to information* on ICT issues by publishing well-documented, readable reports on trends and developments in technology and regulation that include assessments of the implications of these trends for developing countries. In addition, these two units have made good use of the internet to provide online access to these and other information resources.

However, unlike most other organisations – which provide free access to the electronic versions of reports similar to the BDT's *World Telecommunication Development Report* and the SPU's *Internet Reports* and *World Information Society Report* – ITU policy still requires the costs associated with these reports and other publications to be recovered from purchasers, thereby creating potential barriers in access to information in developing countries and civil society organisations.

The ITU Council agreed at its April 2006 session to make an at least temporary exception to this rule when it decided to make ITU-T standards freely available online on an experimental basis for one year, after which it will evaluate the results. Although ITU-T standards are the ITU's most valuable information product in terms of sales revenues, the practice of charging for them is out of step with the practice of many other standards organisations and potentially limits their use, particularly by students and researchers, to the detriment of the ITU.

The ITU has also made use of web-based tools to somewhat improve the *transparency of proceedings* for its own members by providing audiocasts and videocasts of some of its meetings, including the Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference. However, this is a limited transparency since webcasts are password protected and not available to the general public.

In recent years the ITU has sought to widen the scope for *participation by members representing different stakeholders* by eliminating restrictions that prevented sector members from attending plenipotentiary and radiocommunication conferences in their own right as observers, instead of as members of national delegations. The 2006 Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference furthered this process by consolidating and harmonising the detailed rules governing attendance and participation by observers at ITU meetings across the three sectors, and by permitting sector members to attend meetings of the Council and its committees and working groups as observers.

*Capacity-building* has long been one of the core activities of ITU development programmes, and symposiums, workshops, seminars, and training courses of varying durations are one of the principal activities of the BDT today. In addition to the technical capacity-building traditionally provided by the ITU, the BDT has for a number of years sponsored an annual Global Symposium for Regulators and under-

taken other activities aimed at building regulatory capacity in developing countries, such as the ICT Regulation Toolkit it sponsors in conjunction with the World Bank. As well, as mentioned above, the Radiocommunication and Standardisation Bureaus also undertake capacity-building activities related to their work programmes, while the Strategic Planning Unit organises workshops and symposia under the secretary-general's New Initiatives Programme to provide information and analysis on emerging trends and issues.

To date, these improvements have benefited mainly those who are already "members of the club" – ITU member states, sector members and associates. They have been of less benefit to members of the many other communities of interest that have come to see telecommunications as a very important part of the process of linking ICTs with development, and who consequently would like to have easier access to the ITU and to be included in its deliberative processes.

The WSIS process fuelled this interest and heightened expectations that the ITU would continue to build bridges between different stakeholders following the summit's successful conclusion. The past year, 2006, was the ITU's first opportunity to respond. So how did it do?

### *Conclusions on performance in relation to ICT roles and responsibilities*

Taking a leadership role on behalf of the UN system in organising the WSIS and implementing its results was a major step for the ITU – and quite out of keeping with the organisation's past practice, which has been to concentrate on its core technical missions as much as possible while avoiding entanglement with contentious policy/political issues of the kind that often preoccupy the United Nations, and which were present to some degree in the WSIS process.

Having taken this risk and obtained a better result than many expected, ITU member states were faced in 2006 with the question of "what next" in terms of both the ITU's role in building stronger linkages between ICTs and development through the WSIS follow-up process and in reflecting the WSIS legacy of multi-stakeholder engagement in its organisational structures and working methods.

Overall, the results of the Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference as expressed in its Final Acts appear to indicate that ITU member states have agreed to incorporate the results of the WSIS in their long-range plans and ongoing work programmes – but that they do not intend to make major changes to organisational priorities or resource allocations because of it. In particular, it is striking that Resolution 71, "Strategic plan for the Union, 2008-11", makes only passing reference to the WSIS, even in the section on the development sector, and that Decision 5, "Income and expenditure for the Union for the period 2008 to 2011", indicates that no additional financial resources will be allocated to WSIS outcomes.

It is also noteworthy that various proposals to the Conference to expand the ITU's mandate to include ICTs as a whole were referred to the ITU Council for further study. Likewise, as will be discussed in the following section, the Conference decided to take a cautious approach to the question of enhancing civil society participation in ITU activities, in terms of both process and scope.

While the overall results of Antalya suggest a somewhat “business as usual” approach in which the ITU intends to fit the results of the WSIS into its activities to the extent possible – rather than using these results to transform what it does and how it is structured or operates – some of the decisions taken at the conference appear to indicate a growing capacity of developing countries and regions to pursue their agendas and advance their interests, at least with respect to some issues.

Building on the results of the WSIS process, it appears that a significant group of developing countries and regions was able to put together and maintain a coalition that not only determined the results of the elections for some of the key management posts, but also shaped ITU strategy with respect to the potential impact of the internet on international telecommunications policy and regulation, as expressed in the resolutions discussed above.

Taken together, these internet-related resolutions appear to express a determination on the part of a significant number of member states, primarily developing countries, to ensure that the ITU and its member states play a larger role in a number of different aspects of internet governance. The ultimate scope of these ambitions may be evident when these internet-related resolutions are read in conjunction with two other resolutions, which respectively call for a World Telecommunications Policy Forum in 2009 to discuss the implications for international telecommunications policy and regulation of convergence, the internet and NGNs, followed by a World Conference on International Telecommunication in 2012 to review the International Telecommunication Regulations in light of these implications. At the same time, however, the way in which all of these resolutions are drafted also gives plenty of scope for ITU member states that are less enthusiastic about gaining a greater role in internet governance or enlarging the scope of telecommunication regulations to pursue their agendas.

In sum, it appears that the debates that began during the WSIS process about the ITU’s roles and responsibilities in relation to ICT and internet governance are likely to continue for the next several years.

### *Conclusions on performance in relation to modalities and practices of participation*

The ITU has made progress in recent years in increasing the total number of non-governmental entities and organisations that participate in its work as sector members and associates, as well as the number that come from developing countries and regions. In addition, as mentioned above, it has improved the transparency of its proceedings, at least within the organisation, by enhancing the rights of sector members to participate in conferences and meetings, and by providing online access to some events.

As described earlier, the ITU Secretariat has taken significant steps to make better information available on the technical, regulatory, and policy issues facing the organisation and its members. It has done this through reports such as the annual World Telecommunications Development Report and the series of internet reports, as well as

through mechanisms such as the secretary-general’s New Initiatives Programme, which sponsors workshops and seminars on emerging issues. In many cases, these activities have been undertaken in partnership with entities, organisations and other sources of expertise from outside the ITU. These actions and initiatives have helped raise awareness of key issues within the organisation, provided members with better information on matters requiring decisions, and contributed to capacity-building. Some of this information has also been made available free of charge to non-ITU members.

In spite of this progress, as noted in previous sections the ITU faces significant challenges in seeking to live up to the standards and expectations for organisational transparency and multi-stakeholder engagement created by the WSIS process – particularly with respect to engagement with civil society.

As reported above, at the Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference ITU member states recognised the benefits that such engagement could bring and launched a process to study ways and means of enhancing participation through amendments to the existing membership structure and increased use of informal mechanisms. While this may indicate a new openness, it is important to note that this study will be confined to WSIS-related activities, that it will be conducted by member states, who will determine which stakeholders are relevant to these activities and what spheres of competence will remain the exclusive preserve of member states, and that the results will not be final until 2010.

### *Recommendations*

The Antalya Plenipotentiary Conference clearly addressed the main issues facing the ITU as a result of the WSIS, with respect both to its roles and responsibilities in linking ICTs and the global development agenda, and to the challenges it faces in engaging all relevant stakeholders more fully and effectively in its work. However, it just as clearly addressed these issues by thinking “inside the box”, i.e., by seeking to accommodate these issues within its established structures, working methods and governance processes.

If the ITU’s experience over the past two decades in seeking to adapt to “the changing telecommunications environment” is any guide, the results of this approach are likely to be mixed at best. During this period of time, the ITU has made significant progress in responding to the technical challenges and opportunities that have arisen from the transformation of the telecommunications sector into a competitive global business characterised by rapid innovation and the convergence of formerly distinct networks and services. For much of this time, however, the ITU was much less successful in responding to the development challenges and opportunities that arose from these changes, and lost its policy leadership to other organisations that represented new approaches to linking ICTs and development that were more in tune with the times.

By systematically introducing multi-stakeholder approaches in all of the issue areas that came under its purview, the WSIS potentially marks another turning point in the evolution of global ICT and development policy. The ITU’s leadership role in the WSIS follow-up

process gives it an opportunity to give real and continuing effect to the new objective that was added to the ITU Constitution in 1992: “to promote, at the international level, the adoption of a broader approach to the issues of telecommunications in the global information economy and society, by cooperating with other world and regional intergovernmental organisations and those non-governmental organisations concerned with telecommunications.” To do this, however, it will likely have to think “outside the box” in relation to its organisational structures, working methods and governance processes to a much greater degree than was evident in the results of the Antalya Conference (McLean, 2003 and 2007 forthcoming).

As part of this process, ITU member states, sector members and associates who support the goals of enhanced participation should find ways of reaching out to stakeholders who are not currently ITU members, and should include them through the various means available in the discussions and decision-making processes that will take place during the next four years, for instance, through national consultations or by including them in delegations to ITU meetings. For their part, stakeholders with an interest in becoming involved in the work of the ITU should consider taking the initiative of reaching out to the administrations of member states that are likely to be sympathetic to their cause, as well as to sector members and associates, to offer their expertise and support to the ITU reform process. ■

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