

# Civil Society Essential Benchmarks for WSIS

*The essential benchmarks listed in this document reflect work in progress by the civil society content and themes group of the WSIS process. While there is consensus on the priorities stated here this document does not represent absolute consensus, nor does the order of the essential benchmarks constitute a strict ranking in order of importance. For more information on the WSIS CS CT group, contact: Sally Burch, <sburch@alainet.org>*

## 1. Introduction

The approach to the "Information Society" on which the WSIS has been based reflects, to a large extent, a narrow understanding in which ICTs means telecommunications and the Internet. This approach has marginalised key issues relating to the development potential inherent in the combination of knowledge and technology and thus conflicts with the broader development mandate given in UNGA Resolution 56/183.

Civil society is committed to a people-centred, inclusive approach based on respect for human rights principles and development priorities. We believe these principles and priorities should be embedded throughout the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Action Plan. This paper sets out the benchmarks against which civil society will assess the outcomes of the WSIS process and the commitment of all stakeholders to achieving its mandate.

## 2. Human rights

The WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, should take as their foundations the international human rights framework. This implies the full integration, concrete application and enforcement of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including labour rights, the right to development, as well as the principle of non-discrimination. The universality, indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence of all human rights should be clearly recognized, together with their centrality to democracy and the rule of law.

All Principles of the Declaration and all activities in the Action Plan, should be in full compliance with international human rights standards, which should prevail over national legislative frameworks. The "information society" must not result in any discrimination or deprivation of human rights resulting from the acts or omissions of governments or of non-state actors under their jurisdictions. Any restriction on the use of ICTs must pursue a legitimate aim under international law, be prescribed by law, be strictly proportionate to such an aim, and be necessary in a democratic society.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is of fundamental and specific importance to the information society, requiring that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

## 3. Poverty reduction and the Right to Development

Given the unequal distribution of wealth among and within nations, the struggle against poverty should be the top priority on the agenda of the World Summit on the Information Society. It is not possible to achieve sustainable development by embracing new communication technologies without challenging existing inequalities.

Civil society organisations from different parts of the world unite in their call to governments to take this matter very seriously. We want to emphasise that challenging poverty requires more than setting of 'development agendas'. It requires the commitment of significant financial and other resources, linked with social and digital solidarity, channeled through existing and new financing mechanisms that are managed transparently and inclusively of all sectors of society.

## 4. Sustainable development

An equitable Information Society must be shaped by the needs of people and communities and based

on sustainable economic, social development and democratic principles, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Only development that embraces the principles of social justice and gender equality can be said to centrally address fundamental social, cultural and economic divides. Market-based development solutions often fail to address more deep-rooted and persistent inequalities in and between countries of the North and South.

Democratic and sustainable development of the information society can therefore not be left solely to market forces and the propagation of technology. In order to balance commercial objectives with legitimate social interests, recognition should be given to the need for responsibility of the public sector, appropriate regulation and development of public services, and the principle of equitable and affordable access to services.

People and communities must be empowered to develop their own solutions within the information society, in particular to fight poverty and to participate in development through fully democratic processes that allow community access to and participation in decision-making.

## **5. Social Justice**

### **5.1 Gender Equality**

An equitable and inclusive Information Society must be based on gender justice and be particularly guided by the interpretation of principles of gender equality, non-discrimination and women's empowerment as contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the CEDAW Convention. The Action Plan must demonstrate a strong commitment to an intersectional approach to redressing discrimination resulting from unequal power relations at all levels of society. To empower girls and women throughout their life cycle, as shapers and leaders of society, gender responsive educational programs and appropriate learning environments need to be promoted. Gender analysis and the development of both quantitative and qualitative indicators in measuring gender equality through an extensive and integrated national system of monitoring and evaluation are "musts".

### **5.2 Disability**

Specific needs and requirements of all stakeholders, including those with disabilities, must be considered in ICT development. Accessibility and inclusiveness of ICTs is best done at an early stage of design, development and production, so that the Information Society is to become the society for all, at minimum cost.

### **5.3 Labour rights**

Essential human rights, such as privacy, freedom of expression, and the right of trade unions to communicate with employees, should be respected in the workplace. ICTs are progressively changing our way of working and the creation of a secure, safe and healthy working environment, appropriate to the utilisation of ICTs, respecting core labour standards, is fundamental. ICTs should be used to promote awareness of, respect for and enforcement of universal human rights standards and core labor standards.

### **5.4 Indigenous Peoples**

The evolution of the Information Society must be founded on the respect and promotion of the recognition of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and their distinctiveness as outlined in the ILO Convention 169 and the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They have fundamental rights to protect, preserve and strengthen their own identity and cultural diversity. ICT's should be used to support and promote the rights and means of Indigenous Peoples to benefit fully and with priority from their cultural, intellectual and so-called natural resources.

## **6. Literacy, Education and Research**

Literacy and free universal access to education is a key principle. All initiatives must embrace this

principle and respond to needs of all. Knowledge societies require an informed and educated citizenry. Capacity building needs to include skills to use ICTs, media and information literacy, and the skills needed for active citizenship including the ability to find, appraise, use and create information and technology. Approaches that are local, horizontal, gender-responsive and socially-driven and mediated should be prioritised. A combination of traditional and new media as well as open access to knowledge and information should be encouraged.

## **7. Cultural and linguistic diversity**

Communications media and information technologies have a particularly important role to play in sustaining and developing the world's cultures and languages. The implementation of this principle requires support for a plurality of means of information and communication and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, as outlined in UNESCO's Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

## **8. Access and Infrastructure**

Global universal access to communication and information should be a target of the WSIS action plan and the expansion of the global information infrastructure should be based on principles of equality and partnership and guided by rules of fair competition and regulation at both national and international levels. The integration of access, infrastructure and training of the citizenry and the generation of local content, in a framework of social networks and clear public or private policies, is a key basis for the development of egalitarian and inclusive information societies. The evolution of policy should be coordinated internationally but enable a diversity of appropriate solutions based on national and regional input and international sharing of information and resources. This should be people-centered and process-orientated, rather than technologically determined and expert dominated.

## **9. Governance and enabling environment**

### **9.1 Democratic governance**

Good governance in a democratic society implies openness, transparency, accountability, and compliance with the rule of law. Respect for these principles is needed to enforce the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs. Public access to information produced or maintained by governments should be enforced, ensuring that the information is timely, complete and accessible in a format and language the public can understand. This also applies to access to information produced or maintained by corporations where this relates to activities affecting the public interest.

### **9.2 Media**

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the touchstone for an independent, pluralistic and free media. Media pluralism and diversity should be guaranteed through appropriate laws to avoid excessive media concentration. Security and other considerations should not compromise freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information

~~While allowing for government information services to communicate their message, state-controlled media at the national level should be transformed into editorially independent public service media organisations and/or privatised. Efforts which encourage pluralism and diversity of media ownership must be encouraged to avoid excessive media concentration~~

### **9.3 Community media**

Community media, that is media which are independent, community-driven and civil-society based, have a specific and crucial role to play in enabling access and participation for all to the information society, especially the poorest and most marginalised communities. Community media should be supported and promoted. Governments should assure that legal frameworks for community media are non-discriminatory and provide for equitable allocation of frequencies through transparent and accountable mechanisms.

### **9.4 Internet governance**

The global governance of ICT must be based on the values of open participation, inclusiveness, transparency, and democratic accountability. It should establish and support universal participation in addressing new international policy and technical issues raised by the Internet and ICT. No single body and no single stakeholder group is able to manage all of the issues alone. Many stakeholders, cooperating in strict accordance with widely supported rules and procedures, must define the global agenda.

The non-government sector has played a historically critical role in Internet Governance, and this must be recognized. The strength of the Internet as an open non-Government platform should be reinforced, with an explicit and stronger role for Civil Society. The role of Governments should be no greater than that of any other stakeholder group.

## **10 Public Domain of Global Knowledge**

### **10.1 Limited intellectual monopolies**

Human knowledge, including the knowledge of all peoples and communities, also those who are remote and excluded, is the heritage of all humankind and the reservoir from which new knowledge is created. A rich public domain is essential to inclusive information societies. Limited intellectual monopolies, such as copyrights or patents, are granted only for the benefit of society, most notably to encourage creativity and innovation. The benchmark against which they must be reviewed and adjusted regularly is how well they fulfill their purpose.

### **10.2 Free Software**

Software is the cultural technique of the digital age and access to it determines who may participate in a digital world. Free Software with its freedoms of use for any purpose, studying, modification and redistribution is an essential building block for an empowering, sustainable and inclusive information society. No software model should be forbidden or negatively regulated, but Free Software should be promoted for its unique social, educational, scientific, political and economic benefits and opportunities.

### **10.3 Access to information in the public domain**

Today, more than 80% of mankind has no access to the reservoir of human knowledge that is the public domain and from which our new knowledge is created. Their intellectual power remains uninitialized and consequently unused, lost to all humankind. The reservoir of human knowledge must be made equally available to all in online and offline media by means of Free Documentation, public libraries and other initiatives to disseminate information.

### **10.4 Open access to scientific information**

Free scientific information is a requirement for sustainable development. Science is the source of the technological development that empowers the Information Society, including the World Wide Web. In the best tradition of science, scientific authors donate their work to humankind and therefore, it must be equally available to all, on the Web, in online Open Access journals and online Open Archives.

## **11. Security and privacy**

### **11.1 Integrity and security**

Definitions of criminal and terrorist purposes in existing and emerging policies and legislation are ambiguous and prevent the use of information resources for legitimate purposes. The legitimate need for infrastructure integrity must avoid shift to the highly politicized agenda characterized by language referring to the integrity of the military field and the use of information resources for criminal and terrorist purposes.

### **11.2 Right to privacy**

The right to privacy should be affirmed in the context of the information society. It must be defended in public spaces, online, offline, at home and in the workplace. Every person must have the right to

decide freely whether and in what manner he or she wants to receive information and communicate with others. The possibility of communicating anonymously must be ensured for everyone. The collection, retention, use and disclosure of personal data, no matter by whom, should remain under the control of the individual concerned. The power of the private sector and governments over personal data, including monitoring and surveillance, increases the risk of abuse, and must be kept to a minimum under clearly specified, legal conditions.