



editorial

A Trojan Horse

The modern-day equivalent of the Trojan horse is our global communications network. Without large armies, dedicated cyber hackers could penetrate national networks, wreak havoc and threaten developed societies. While it may be possible to destroy the information networks that have given life to our information age by indiscriminate hacking or by the systematic use of directed energy and radio frequency weaponry, ironically 1.5 million villages on earth still lack the most basic communication tools. Tools such as phone, fax, or Internet access. Tools that in the long run may be our best hope for bringing peace and prosperity to our world.

After all, it was compassion not conflict that inspired the technologies of the modern age of communication. Marconi saw the telegraph as a way to make the world a smaller and more peaceful place. The telephone was the result of Bell's desire to overcome the deafness of his wife and students and the development of the World Wide Web came from a quest by scientists to share their collective knowledge.

However, multilateral agreements may now be needed to ensure the long-term security of our information and communication networks and to address real concerns for privacy, authenticity and linguistic diversity in our online world. The time has come to make the 'global village' a secure reality and to ensure that all of its citizens benefit from the information and communication tools that have created it.

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Maria Livanos Cattai

"WSIS will be a watershed event"



The private sector sees positive results from PrepCom-2 and will ask the heads of state meeting in Evian in early June to commit themselves fully to making a success of the World Summit on the Information Society. Interview with Ms. Maria Livanos Cattai, Secretary-General of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC, Paris).

How do you envision the implementation of partnerships that can meet civil society's expectations?

ICC and the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors have emphasized that business can bring networks, experience and entrepreneurship to the partnership. All players are needed if information and communications technologies (ICTs) are to be promoted effectively, since each stakeholder has its special strength.

Are there any models from which to draw our inspiration?

There is no one type of partnership to be followed in every case. Each partnership must be modelled to suit a specific project, with the partners focusing on their own areas of expertise. It is very important to learn from the experiences of many public private partnerships that are doing critical

work on ICT for development issues, for example on youth issues, and build from there to create productive partnerships that take into consideration local dynamics, special needs, etc.

With respect to the Plan of Action that is taking shape, what types of concrete projects could mobilize the private sector, in your opinion?

Businesses dealing with ICTs should be aware of the entire Plan of Action. The section on investment is of course of great relevance to business. Concrete projects will emerge and investment decisions will be made when businesses find that new markets meet the necessary conditions to make their actions possible - investment, creating new businesses and jobs. A solid plan of action that outlines how the actions are going to be accomplished will indeed have a positive impact on mobilizing the private sector.

What is the private sector's vision for overcoming inequalities and making sure there is something for everyone?

Donor governments must find ways to make their aid more effective. Aid recipients must in turn put policies in place that will generate increased private sector investment. If the world's poor countries are to break out of the poverty trap, ICT development aid must be a catalyst to stimulate business enterprise, economic growth and wealth creation.

As the G8 meeting in Evian approaches, what role can the private sector play in convincing the heads

of state of the world's most powerful countries to commit to constructive participation in the WSIS?

Before each G8 Summit, ICC delivers a statement on behalf of world business to the G8 leaders. In this year's statement, ICC says that WSIS will be a watershed event in raising awareness of the potential of ICTs to promote economic and social development. The business view as expressed by ICC is frequently reflected in the communiqué issued at the end of the Summit.

What do you think of the idea of a Digital Charter as suggested by President Abdoulaye Wade at PrepCom-2?

The Digital Charter proposed by President Abdoulaye Wade is an innovative and interesting idea. I agree with President Wade that such a charter could well provide a yardstick for judging progress. In the business view, criteria should be based on common elements: affordability, measurability, sustainability and replicability.

Private sector The right tone

For business, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is an opportunity to raise awareness of information and communications technologies (ICT) as a tool for economic and social growth.

Provided the right conditions are created at every level - national, regional and international - new markets will open. There will be plenty of opportunities for both foreign and local investment and entrepreneurship will flourish.

That is the business vision of what WSIS can achieve. Its fulfillment will mean more jobs, wealth creation and higher living standards, especially in the developing countries that so urgently need to derive the fullest benefits from ICT.

Business knows that it has much to contribute to the success of WSIS. After all, it is largely business that is developing com-

munications technologies, and it is business that brings them to market and applies them.

So we are calling – and this was the thrust of business interventions at the second Preparatory Committee meeting (PrepCom-2) – for the fullest possible business involvement in every stage of WSIS. In the run-up so far, this has not always been forthcoming.

However, the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors welcomes the positive reaction from governments' response to the points business representatives



Ayesha Hassan

raised at the PrepCom-2. Admission of business representatives as observers to some of the later PrepCom sessions was a further positive step.

It is also gratifying to see that some of the business priorities are included in the governments' section of some of the preparatory documents, so that from the business point of view, the right tone is being set. However, we would like to see stronger acknowledgment of the importance of market forces in securing the objectives that have been set for WSIS.

The Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI) is preparing substantive written comments on the revised declaration and action plan and will make these available before the end-May deadline, and thus ahead of the intersessional meeting. That meeting will be most productive if observers are allowed to speak, providing additional input that will ensure that WSIS itself has every chance of success.

Ayesha Hassan

Senior Policy Manager

International Chamber of Commerce, Paris

Civil Society A Roadmap to Partnerships



Renate Bloem

The establishment of a Civil Society Bureau (CSB) as the NGO counterpart to the Inter-governmental Bureau during the second session of the WSIS Preparatory Committee (PrepCom2) is an important first step in the practical implementation of the vision that Governments, the Private Sector and Civil Society (CS) should be equal partners when it comes to designing and building our societies of tomorrow.

The mere establishment of the CSB alone is a milestone in the historical UN/NGO/CSOs relationship. It is proof that after more than 50 years of consultative relationship with the United Nations and accreditation to UN conferences, NGOs have moved from the periphery to centre-stage. It is also an accomplishment of CS that it was competent enough to effectively organize itself after having gone through the difficult task of identifying the different families and diverse segments that define the ever growing complex and diverse parts of today's Civil Society.

However, in order to not only bring Civil Society to the negotiation table in the context of the WSIS for the outcome document, and later as partners for its implementation, but to assure that the contributions it is capable to make will be heard, further steps are required.

While the UN General Assembly's resolution 56/183 encourages the three actors, Governments, Civil Society and Private Sector, to actively participate and engage in the WSIS process, the added value of the multi sector partnership needs to be reaffirmed.

A clear and agreed upon understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities needs to be established and respected (e.g. through a memorandum of understanding), including the multi-faceted role of NGO/CSOs as innovative approach instigators to facilitators and watchdogs.

As may be needed, confidence building measures through informal meetings and roundtables should be enhanced.

NGO/CSO's legitimacy stems from them being held accountable to their constituencies that often include grassroots, marginalized, vulnerable and dis-empowered people. NGO/CSOs will keep their concerns in mind when they will interact with governments and the private sector in negotiating the Action Plan. They will also see that future projects to implement the Action Plan will be demand-driven to benefit the underprivileged. In embracing the WSIS as a major opportunity to advance the development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals, NGO/CSOs bring a high commitment, ethics, a commitment to universal human values and their multi-cultural creativity and experiences to the table. They look forward to an innovative WSIS process and Summit in which their role as partners is fully recognized.

Renate Bloem

President of the Conference of NGOS (CONGO)

Tanzania Refugees Get Connected

Kasulu is a small village in Tanzania located more than 1000 kilometers from the capital. It has no electricity, and the telephone service is unreliable. Yet now, thanks to the generosity of an American foundation, the Kasulu refugee camp has a computer center and an Internet connection. Two other centers have also been opened so local residents from the surrounding area can take advantage of this giant leap into the future, or rather, into today's 21st-century world. Assisted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Glo-



Half of the world's approximately 50 million displaced persons are children.

bal Catalyst Foundation had to start from scratch. No buildings? Never mind that: partners were found to build them. No electricity? Ingenious solutions were implemented: solar panels for the first center, biogas for the second and a more standard generator for the third.

The Mtabila camp's Internet center is run by the refugees themselves. The management committee they set up has decided that, in the mornings, the ten computers would be used for distance learning by secondary students and other targeted groups, particularly women. Afternoons are reserved for Internet use by the refugees.

On average, 30 refugees use these services each day for the low cost of US\$0.50. For these people, who have lost everything, the Internet opens up the world and provides extraordinary access to a whole universe of information. Cisco Systems has made its Cisco Networking Academy teaching program available to these centers. Once the refugees have successfully completed the program, they receive a diploma that is recognized throughout the world—their password for access to the future and perhaps their first-class ticket home.

But how can this experience be provided to even more people when food, basic care and access to primary education are sorely lacking? Due to limited financial resources, UNHCR and its partners can provide only the bare minimum, and sometimes not even that much. Should the camps really be connecting to the Internet when everything else is in short supply? A few little bytes do not make a very nourishing meal. What should be done?

And who are we to categorically answer this question? It cannot be answered on the basis of reason alone. It is impossible to apply objective standards and criteria for intervention. In reply we can only cite the testimony of one of the Mtabila refugees, who recently sent his first e-mail to the chairman of the Global Catalyst Foundation. He wrote, "I don't know how to thank you for providing us with Internet access. Before, I felt lost, forgotten by the world. Now I have a lifeline. I feel acknowledged. I can talk to the outside world, try to find my family. My life has meaning again. Now I have hope that someday I will be able to go home..."

Pierre-Bernard Le Bas

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Geneva Summit

How to Participate

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) will be held at Geneva-Palexpo, the large center that hosts major exhibitions and events such as the Geneva International Motor Show, Telecom, etc. This venue is advantageously located right next door to Geneva International Airport, only a ten-minute bus ride from downtown. It consists of vast adjacent and interconnecting halls that will be converted into conference areas for the Summit. In addition to the intergovernmental political process, which will take place in Palexpo's Hall 1 from December 10-12, 2003, the WSIS will provide opportunities for the information society's various stakeholders to present their viewpoints, know-how and expectations, to share experiences and to enter into new partnerships in the field of information and communication.

For this purpose, the Swiss government has decided to make a range of meeting, discussion and exhibition areas available from December 8-13, in the immediate vicinity of Palexpo's political summit (Hall 2, Hall 4 and Conference Center). Divided into two main parts, these areas will accommodate a number of stands.

There are two ways for Summit participants to organize an event:

- To book a conference room or exhibition space, contact the Office of the Federal Council Delegate for the WSIS, which is handling all facilities made available by the Swiss government. More information and details about availability can be found on the host country's web site (www.wsisgeneva2003.org).
- Alternatively, the ICT4D Platform is providing exhibition and conference space throughout Hall 4 for concrete projects that use ICTs to aid development. For more information on this platform organized by the Swiss Agency for De-



Geneva-Palexpo

velopment and Cooperation (SDC) in cooperation with the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), see the web site (www.ict-4d.org).

To date, the following organizations have expressed an interest in staging an event: UN/Information Department with EBU (World Forum on Electronic Media), World Bank (InfoDev), UNESCO (roundtable with Nobel prize winners), UNDP, UN Regional Economic Commissions, UN ICT Task Force, Regional development banks. Various federal entities are involved as well (SECO, Federal Office of Culture, Science and

Research Group). Events organized by civil society and the private sector are also being planned.

All of these events will make an essential contribution to the Summit's visibility and success. Participants ought to be able to make their voices heard in an impartial way, regardless of their affiliations (international organization, private sector, civil society or government). It is important to Switzerland that all opinions relating to Summit themes be expressed as openly as possible.

Bruno Romazzotti

Swiss Executive Secretariat for the WSIS

