

## **Private Sector and Multi-Stakeholderism in the WSIS Process**

Ayesha Hassan

*Senior Policy Manager, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)*

The World Summit on the Information Society to be held in Tunis, November 2005 will take place in one of the regions that most awaits the benefits of information and communication technologies, as well as the promotion of the Information Society. Business looks towards WSIS Tunis with optimism and caution. The decisions that will take place during the remaining preparatory process for the Summit will impact the participation of and messages from business in Tunis.

### **Financing mechanisms**

At a preparatory meeting for Tunis in February (Prepcom 2) governments welcomed the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF), which aims to fund ICT related initiatives in less developed and developing countries. However, such welcoming seems premature before the originators of the fund have made clear the principles and processes by which any resources provided by it would be collected and distributed. Business looks for assurances from the DSF that all its sources will be contributed solely on a voluntary basis, none of it mandatory. Concerns about the voluntary nature of the fund, its accountability and its allocation will continue until satisfactory progress has been made on these matters.

For development to be sustainable, business stresses the importance of an enabling environment that:

- empowers people,
- facilitates the exercise of freedom of expression and other rights,
- promotes the free flow of information,

- encourages innovation and investment,
- unleashes the entrepreneurial spirit, and
- stimulates productivity for people, society, enterprises and governments.

A voluntary fund has to be complementary to existing financial mechanisms, especially in providing seed funding to encourage the provision of other forms of contributions, including those in kind.

It is important to stress that business applauds the principles for the Information Society that were agreed at WSIS Geneva. Now we must look ahead, not re-open existing agreements and previously agreed issues and lose the progress of the past three years. Business, along with other players, is ready to contribute to further growth of the Information Society.

#### **ICT-oriented actions and initiatives**

At the Geneva Summit there was a parallel event on development, the ICT4D Platform, which was judged a success. In Tunis, there will be an ICT 4 ALL whose goal of sustainable development for all will, it is hoped, be closer. Business knows that this goal can only be attained if the elements of an enabling environment noted above are in place.

Coming out of the WSIS process, we must ensure that this environment remains friendly and welcoming to the private sector's role in the Information Society. CCBI continues to believe that the operational part of Tunis should focus on showing progress on the commitments made at WSIS-Geneva to complement its Declaration and Plan of Action.

In that regard, particular recognition should be given to areas/countries where progress has been made on the commitments in the Declaration and Plan of Action. The essentials are:

- the creation of the appropriate environment for ICT infrastructure,
- education and capacity-building,
- policy, legal and regulatory frameworks that are pro-competitive, spur investment and foster entrepreneurship,
- the rule of law and the protection of intellectual property, and
- the liberalization of telecommunications infrastructure and trade.

### **Follow-up and implementation mechanisms**

We recommend that the follow-up mechanisms for WSIS be closely related to the core of the United Nation system and attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Such mechanisms must continue to include business as a major and important player. It is recommended that the processes and approach that have so successfully included all voices, such as the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), could be retained as a model of an inclusive forum for discussions and actions.

### **Conclusion**

Business would like to put forward the following summary points:

1. Continue the inclusion of business actors and consider the multi-stakeholder approach, as agreed in Principle 1 of the Geneva Declaration of Principles, to be the guiding principle of all WSIS implementation and follow-up mechanisms.
2. WSIS Plan of Action implementation and any follow-up mechanisms should be established under the responsibility of the United Nations Secretary-General.
3. Business and other actors can only effectively engage in implementation and follow up mechanisms if they are associated early on in the definition of these mechanisms.