



BUILDING AN INFORMATION SOCIETY

A ROADMAP FOR THE

WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

November 2002

Introduction

The World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) is participating in the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI), a coalition of business organizations providing input into the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The WSIS will consist of two meetings – in Geneva in December 2003 and in Tunisia in 2005. The UN General Assembly resolution calling for the organization of the WSIS states that it should address the whole range of relevant issues related to the information society. The UN General Assembly has also recommended that the WSIS adopt a Declaration of Principles on the fundamentals of the Information Society in the 21st Century and a Plan of Action for concerted development of the information society. Initial preparatory documents support a broad agenda for the WSIS.

World Summit on Sustainable Development Experience

The potential for a WSIS agenda of virtually unlimited scope raises concern among business, particularly in view of our experience with the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which took place in August 2002. From the outset, the effectiveness of the WSSD preparatory process was compromised by the unwillingness or inability of governments, NGOs, and international organizations to set priorities among a wide range of development-related issues. Business' participation in the WSSD was effective because from the beginning it focused on clearly communicating a small set of key messages. The lesson from the WSSD is that if a summit is about everything, it is ultimately about little.

WITSA Recommendations

WITSA believes strongly that governments, in preparation for WSIS, should identify and focus on a set of priority issues that highlight the fundamental building blocks of an information society. Focusing on these priority issues will create a meaningful framework for demonstrable progress toward the long-term sustainability of a truly global information society.

WITSA believes that the WSIS should focus on three priorities:

- The role of government in introducing competition and providing a favorable regulatory environment to enable the development and deployment of an underlying Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure
- Education, both basic and in the use of information technology products and applications
- Benefits of applications to improve the lives of citizens, specifically e-government, e-health and e-learning

Discussion

Development/Deployment of the Infrastructure: An underlying ICT infrastructure is essential to benefiting from the information society. Without such an infrastructure, including access devices, it will be impossible to connect to the Internet from which many of the benefits of the information society come. Thus, the WSIS should focus first on the role of governments in introducing competition and providing a favorable regulatory environment to create the framework necessary to ensure such deployment/development by the private sector.

Education: Education is necessary in order to obtain sustainable benefit from the information society. Without the requisite education, including basic tools such as literacy and more targeted tools such as computer literacy, the citizenry will not be able to utilize the deployed infrastructure and equipment necessary to access the Internet. Thus, the WSIS should focus on a framework that will develop the requisite skills through appropriate public-private partnerships to engage in an information society.

Benefits of Applications: Applications are the tools that allow citizens to derive the benefit from the information infrastructure. ICT applications can play an important role in advancing general economic development and living standards. For example, the UNICT Task Force is currently supporting an approach that emphasizes the importance of ICT in development. In fact, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General, has stated his intentions to exploit ICTs to meet the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, we recognize three primary uses of ICT:

- *e-Learning:* closely linked to the education section above, this recognizes the potential for ICT to advance/enhance education.
- *e-Health:* ICT can greatly enhance health care delivery systems by connecting health care professionals around the world, including online networks of expertise, and access to information about health issues confronting countries.

- *e-Government*: WSIS could also serve as an important forum to address e-Government. Such a focus could ensure that governments better serve their constituencies. Moreover, e-Government initiatives will enhance participation in the information society.

The private sector is the primary investor in and innovator of infrastructure, products and services. Effective markets are therefore essential to ensuring a sustainable information society. The priorities set forth above support the creation of markets by fostering a connected, educated and healthy population that can increasingly become engaged in the information society. Such engagement begins through the use of ICT for development and then builds upon itself as development proceeds. WITSA believes that public/private partnerships can often play an important role in facilitating these applications.

About WITSA

The World Information Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) is a consortium of 49 information technology (IT) industry associations from economies around the world. WITSA members represent over 90 percent of the world IT market. As the global voice of the IT industry, WITSA is dedicated to:

- advocating policies that advance the industry's growth and development;
- facilitating international trade and investment in IT products and services;
- strengthening WITSA's national industry associations through the sharing of knowledge, experience, and critical information;
- providing members with a vast network of contacts in nearly every geographic region of the world;
- hosting the World Congress on IT, the only industry sponsored global IT event;
- hosting the Global Public Policy Conference; and
- hosting the Global Information Security Summit.

Conclusion

Infrastructure development/deployment, education, and applications, eLearning, e-Health and e-Government create a reinforcing framework to develop the sustainability of an information society:

- Without an educated population any deployed infrastructure will be a lost investment;
- An educated population without the infrastructure will not be able to engage in the information society; and
- Without applications so that citizens can experience the benefits of the information society and the resultant societal benefits, there will not be sufficient demand to sustain an information society for the long-term.

WITSA Members

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