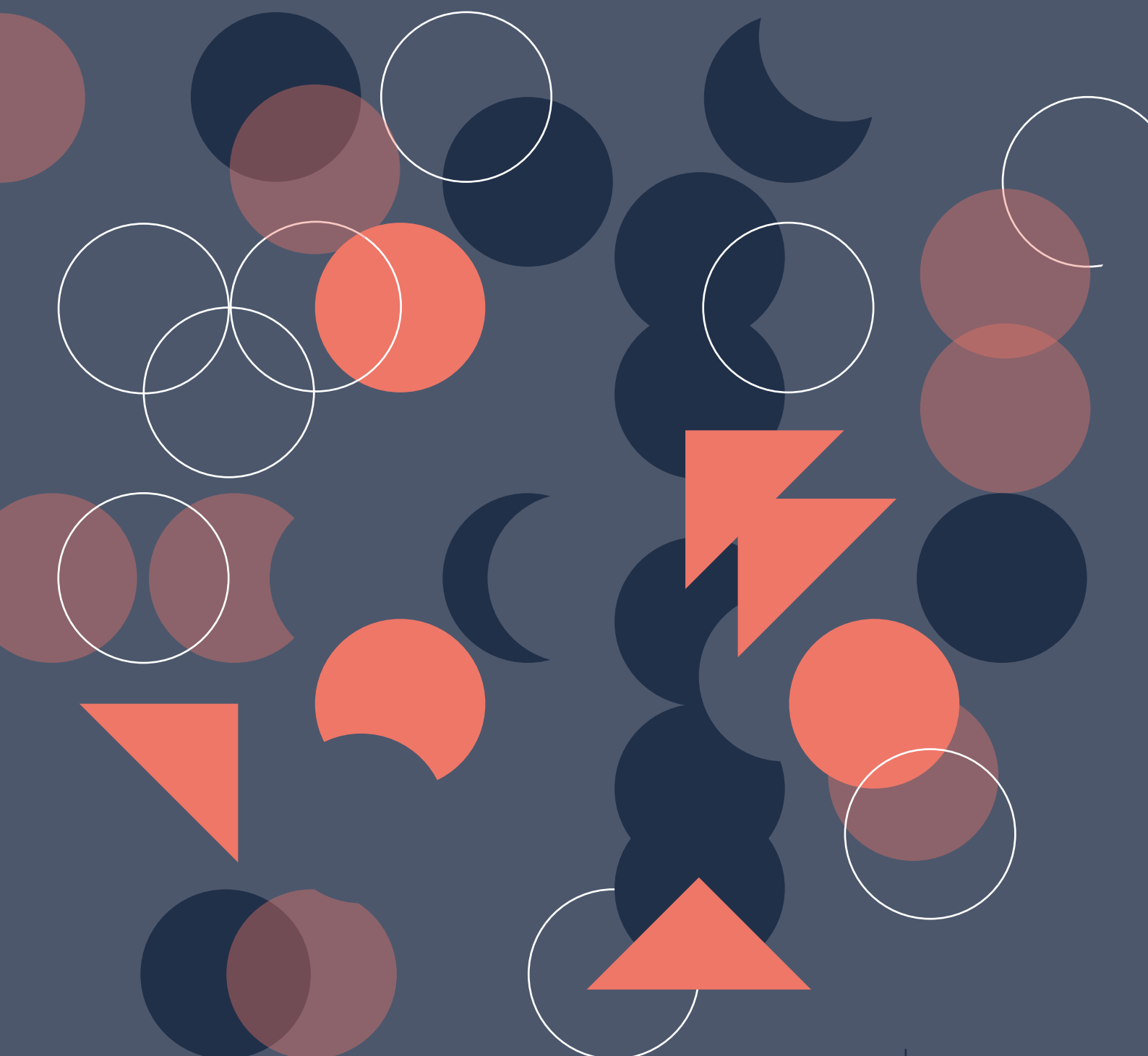


GLOBAL PARTNERS DIGITAL

Advocacy Bytes

| WSIS+10 Review



| Jan 2017

1 Snapshot

Dates covered by this case study

June – December 2015

Background

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is today acknowledged as a cornerstone of Internet governance. Its creation stands as a milestone, signalling the increased involvement of states in Internet-related policy making. Among other things it has established the first (and still most widely used) definition of Internet governance, mandated the establishment of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and initiated still ongoing discussions on enhanced cooperation. The Summit – held over two parts in 2003 and 2005 – set out ‘the WSIS vision’ of a “people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society”.

In accordance with UN norms, the process was subject to a Review to assess the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit ten years on. In 2014, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution which outlined the form of this review – an intergovernmental preparatory process with input from all stakeholders, followed by a two-day High-Level meeting.

While the review formally began in 2013 with events and studies organised by UN Agencies including the CSTD, the ITU and UNESCO, this case study specifically examines the six-month intergovernmental preparatory process for the High-Level Meeting, which concluded the Review in December 2015.

Structure and decisionmaking processes

The structure of the Review – including the process of drafting the outcome document and the opportunities for non-government stakeholder input – was agreed by governments sitting at the UN General Assembly in New York, led by two co-facilitators, who were appointed in June 2015.

The drafting of the outcome document included two direct opportunities for non-government stakeholders – including civil society – to provide written comments on the draft text, as well as two in-person meetings, where civil society representatives could engage with other stakeholders to influence the final text. However, final agreement on the outcome document lay wholly in the hands of states.

Remit

The WSIS+10 Review was tasked with “tak[ing] stock of progress” towards the WSIS vision over the 10-year period since the Summit and deciding on next steps. The final aim was to have “an inter-governmentally agreed outcome document” for adoption by the UNGA. This intergovernmental process started in June 2015, when the President of the UNGA appointed two UN governments to co-facilitate the process. These co-facilitators were tasked with consulting with, and collecting inputs from, all stakeholders (member state representatives and non-government stakeholders), and using these to draft the outcome document over the six month period.

2 What was at stake

While outcomes of a process like the WSIS+10 Review process are non-binding, they can shape and inform what states do at the national level. They are essentially a set of promises made by states, which can then influence other related debates, be cited in high-profile documents by other bodies, and be used (by civil society and the public) to remind governments of their commitments. Getting the right language into the WSIS+10 Review outcome document was therefore seen as important.

The following issue areas were identified as key priorities for civil society:

- **Development:** ICT for development and access had been central to the WSIS at the Geneva and Tunis summits, but had gradually slipped off the agenda in favour of Internet governance issues like enhanced cooperation. The Review was seen as a way to reinstate development as a core WSIS priority.
- **Security:** the WSIS offered an opportunity to ensure that states committed to a human-rights respecting agenda on security.

Another key area for discussion was **the roles of stakeholders**. The WSIS ‘Tunis Agenda’ (the outcome document of the second summit), while reiterating that international policy making ultimately rests with states, did also acknowledge the essential role of other stakeholders. The Review offered the opportunity to restate the importance of an open, transparent, and inclusive approach, and review the role of the IGF in the broader Internet governance landscape.

3 Challenges for civil society engagement

- **Lack of institutional support for civil society input:** A lack of regional consultations on the review process (the two official ones were both held in New York) meant engagement was out of reach for many civil society actors, for both financial and practical reasons. Additionally, unlike the WSIS summits, there was no civil society bureau at the UN or division to facilitate input.
 - **Limited time to engage:** The specific modalities for the six-month intergovernmental process were not clear until the co-facilitators were appointed in June 2015, giving civil society little time to coordinate engagement. This was compounded by a lack of prior knowledge, as many of the groups that had engaged in the 2003/2005 Summits were no longer engaged, or had not followed the process over the 10 years.
 - **Multilateral nature:** Ultimate decisionmaking power lay with states, limiting the potential scope of civil society input.
-

4 What happened

→ PRE REVIEW (JANUARY-JUNE 2015)

Before June 2015 – and even before the modalities of the Review were set out – civil society groups began to prepare for the Review. Coordination and information sharing activities in this period were carried out online through mailing lists, and during a dedicated face-to-face coordination meeting.

Online communication: Civil society groups used existing mailing lists to share information about the upcoming review. A dedicated mailing list was created in May, which was then used during the Review process to share information on modalities and procedures and coordinate joint submissions of text into the Review.

Face-to-face meeting: Held in Paris in March 2015, this meeting brought together more than thirty groups from around the world. It enabled civil society to:

- Share information about the process;
- Begin to coordinate joint priorities and messages to feed into the review;
- Map related processes and events;
- Identify potential allies, and key actors to lobby.

→ DURING REVIEW (JUNE–DECEMBER)

There were two official opportunities to input into the draft outcome text of the process; the first draft, or ‘non-paper’ (July 2015) and the second draft or ‘zero-draft’ (October 2015). A third round of comments on the draft was opened by the co-facilitators following the IGF, following pressure from groups, who wanted an additional chance to comment on the draft. More than 100 civil society groups in total either submitted text into one or both of these documents, or signed onto joint submissions.

Non-government stakeholders also participated in the two in-person Informal Interactive Consultation Meetings held in July and October 2015, and were able to engage with the co-facilitators at the 2015 Internet Governance Forum (IGF) at a dedicated main session and side meetings. Notably, civil society were also able to participate in the High-Level meeting where the outcome text was adopted. Although the text had already been finalised by this point, this illustrates civil society’s success in opening up the process to greater non-governmental input.

In the absence of official UN-coordinated regional meetings and financial support from the UN, civil society groups had to be proactive in coordinating their engagement. This meant both carving out new spaces, and repurposing existing ones.

This took place at several levels.

National level: At the national level, groups reached out to national decision makers, including representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Telecommunications/ICT departments. For example, in India, civil society groups shared their submissions into the draft outcome text through a roundtable and meetings with policymakers.

Regional level: At the regional level, civil society organised informal face-to-face meetings in order to broaden engagement and identify joint priorities which could then be used for advocacy with state representatives. This took a variety of forms. In some cases, sessions on the WSIS+10 Review were organised at existing platforms or events such as national and regional IGFs. In other cases, groups pooled funding in order to organise dedicated events on the Review, such as in Asia and the African IGF.

Global level: Building on these national and regional efforts, an informal face-to-face meeting, bringing together a diverse range of groups from across the world, enabled civil society to deliver a joint submission into the Review, which suggested specific text edits based on an agreed set of civil society priorities.

5 Outcomes

The WSIS+10 outcome document was adopted by all members of the UN General Assembly at its 70th session in December 2015 (*A/RES/70/125*). It was generally recognised as a progressive text, in particular for:

- **Its inclusion of a separate section on human rights**, perhaps the most significant and obvious impact of civil society engagement in the WSIS+10 Review. This section included language on surveillance and on privacy, preceding the section on “building confidence security in the use of ICTs”. This was important because it helped to balance text in that section otherwise strongly emphasised issues like national security, terrorism and cybercrime.
- **Its nuanced articulation of the digital divide and of access**, acknowledging the importance of addressing inequalities in gender, educational level, and geography (rural/urban). The text also included a standalone paragraph on gender, and a commitment to ensuring the “full participation” of women in decisionmaking processes related to ICTs.
- **Its call to strengthen the IGF through reforms**. The outcome document said that the IGF’s mandate should be renewed for ten years, rather than the five which had at one point been proposed, and also incorporated some of the recommendations of a 2012 UN working group report on “improvements to the IGF”, such as having formal IGF outcomes from each conference. Since the IGF is one of the only international multistakeholder Internet policy forums, strengthening its outcomes could help civil society play a greater role in shaping Internet governance norms and policy development.

All of these aspects of the outcome document corresponded to text edits suggested in **a joint contribution from global civil society**, and reflect sustained advocacy and lobbying efforts around the submission.

But civil society’s gains were not limited to the text itself. By putting pressure on the co-facilitators and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), and by lobbying states, civil society were able to secure many more opportunities for input into the WSIS+10 Review process than had been originally set out by the co-facilitators in June. This included an additional opportunity to input into a draft of the text in November, and the chance to address all stakeholders at the High-Level Meeting, where the outcome text was adopted. This sets an important precedent for future WSIS-related engagement.

6 Lessons learned

- **Building relationships with UN administrators can be useful.** Good communication with administrators within the Review process – including UN DESA, the co-facilitators and their assistants – was useful in several ways. Informal information-sharing gave civil society groups crucial insight into the negotiation process – helping them identify openings for direct impact. Additionally, civil society groups were able to leverage their relationships with administrators to improve the Review process to their advantage. For example, after pressure from civil society, the co-facilitators opened the outcome document for a third round of comments, and ran a community-led process to select civil society speakers for the WSIS High Level Event.
- **Official channels aren't the whole story.** With no official national and regional consultations, finding spaces for unofficial coordination was crucial. Face-to-meetings and online communication enabled the meaningful participation of civil society groups who couldn't afford to travel to New York, and helped civil society coordinate messaging, advocacy and joint submissions.
- **Be clear about what you want.** In an environment where the issues under discussion are broad and complex, a direct approach – with a set of clearly defined, concrete asks – is important. Because of their strong coordination efforts, civil society groups were able to present a clear joint submission on the penultimate draft, outlining exactly what text they wanted to include and take out. This approach made it easier for states and the co-facilitators to incorporate civil society perspectives.
- **Don't rule out alliances with other stakeholder groups.** While there was initially little obvious common ground between business and civil society actors regarding the Review, by reaching out these two groups were able to jointly craft an **open letter** to the President of the General Assembly – calling for an open, transparent and inclusive process. Uniting on this issue helped keep pressure on the UN to enable input from a broad range of stakeholder groups.
- **Not everyone is an expert.** Government officials and UN Mission delegates can have broad remits, and aren't always experts on everything they work on. Informed interventions from civil society can therefore have more impact than might be expected; in some cases, these diplomats and officials may be surprisingly receptive to civil society views or expertise.

Acknowledgments

This text has been compiled by Global Partners Digital, on the basis of observations and input by civil society groups and individuals participating in the WSIS Review process. Special thanks go to Deborah Brown of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC).