

***Education, academia and research taskforce
Input to WGIG working document “Education and WGIG”***

*Our principle: “education for shared knowledge societies,
via open cognition paradigms and open access tools”;*

Our plan of action: “scaling up strategies for replicability, modularity and sustainability”

Addressing “internet governance and internet-related public policy”---WGIG

As the document doesn't yet offer a full section on the issue of education, the taskforce can only recommend that the new items offered here be integrated within the framework of WGIG as media and ICTs,—especially in the larger understanding of internet governance—are crucial for education and research development, and a corollary, that education and research are crucial to the development of Internet and attendant technologies itself. There is a co-dependence between a country's capacity to provide basic literacy in media and ICT education and its capacity to create learning economies that facilitate cultures for knowledge and employment.

The taskforce feels that the definition of governance should be reflective of a new logic of public participation and investment; the implication in collective decision-making is to be grounded in the local decision-making process without total disengagement from the national public service. The notion of co-regulation might be more appropriate than governance, as rules will have to be implemented and sanctions applied, if needed, by legitimate, democratic instances.

For public policy purposes, whatever the developments of Internet and future ICTs, it is essential to keep open formats, interoperability and to promote actively the openness of the system at both ends (production and reception), especially for education and research purposes. In order to make it a plural, balanced and diverse Internet, the creation and development of a legitimate and nurtured Open Access transit agreement is necessary. The systematic creation of mirror sites in countries without extensive broadband facilities, relayed by open source software, especially in Africa, is a necessity as well, so that educators and researchers may easily download materials of all kinds (text, video, audio).

The development of standardised approaches to data-handling and information exchange are crucial to open access to allow for changing vocabularies and to bridge both the incompatibilities of computer systems and the digital divide. On an international scale, open standards are critical to the effective exchange of information by multi-stakeholders across diverse contexts and systems.

The WGIG should focus on trying to solve the current scaling up issues, as many initiatives exist, but they are poorly coordinated, with bad or non-existent linkages among a variety of actors (institutional, private sector, international, grassroots, etc.). While recognizing the promise of multi-cultural contexts for knowledge exchange and creation, the taskforce perceives the lack of cultural diversity in current media and ICTs as a real threat to the use of language and the representation of all citizens in the new international economy of culture and knowledge societies.

Governance mechanisms should aim at improving media and ICT education for the creation of information literate citizens and workers. They should facilitate lifelong training and long-distance exchanges as well as help create awareness among users of ICT related issues and other citizenship issues like health, human rights, etc. Their final goal should be the reduction of illiteracy within one country and the bridging of the digital divide. As a result they should be open, transparent, multilateral and democratic. The WSIS process should aim at enhancing cooperation and coordination among the variety of multi-stakeholder partners, with a view to establish criteria for evaluation, improvement, sustainability.

The education taskforce also believes that more efforts have to be made to push for public awareness on Internet governance and citizenship. Every citizen is a potential netizen and he/she should rightly understand how the Internet works since it is generating our knowledge environment. Much of the substance of the WGIG Issue Papers should be included into educational and teaching material on all levels around the globe. WSIS is an ideal opportunity to make this call, primarily to the public media and to the educational and training institutions. To establish a viable and dynamic creative commons society, people have to understand how the DNS is functioning, how IP addresses are allocated, what basic legal instruments exist in fields like cyber-crime, Intellectual Property Rights, eCommerce, e-government, human rights and development etc.

The taskforce members encourage raising awareness about the ICT design and development processes themselves ; education in the use of best / standard methods of design and development of ICT seems urgent as it reveals a policy gap between how society wants ICTs deployed and used and what needs to be communicated to the community that actually develops them to achieve those purposes. People also have to be aware of diverging positions, according to the point of view of the different stakeholders and make educated decisions as to what they think is best for their sustainable development This applies to people both in the developed and developing world and if not attended to urgently may give the feeling that WSIS is serving the elite, when it has to serve all the people.

Financial mechanisms and WGIG

The education taskforce advocates the centrality of public funding of education and the role of community-driven initiatives, with local control of financial mechanisms and content of expression. While considering the opportunities offered by private investment, Internet governance should not be privatized nor displace the input of public finance and the role of public services. ICTs are enablers (“outils habilitants”) of development and as such remain a public resource to which all must contribute fully.

So the education taskforce recommends that governments:

- Encourage local and regional modes of finance, including micro-credit, small business investments, funds from non-profit foundations and other donors, to be applied more specifically in content development, open source software applications, knowledge sharing; so as to shift emphasis from global financing to local sustainability;
- Allow for a balance between market demand, international supply and public development initiatives and projects, especially those with high risk and low short term return expectations, which characterizes many education and research projects;

- Modify the Development Bank's attitudes and constraints, as well as those of other bodies like WIPO, moving them from policy reforms to facilitating public financing of education projects, on a medium- to long-term basis;
- Include civil society, especially community associations, NGOs, and small and medium-sized businesses, in discussions on the financing of internet and ICTs, as they have a good feel for the feasibility and the adequacy of the financial mechanisms and needs in relation to the scope of the education projects;
- Design and make available open access software applications and low-cost proprietary shareware for helping actors in the education and research field to do their financing, accounting and tax administration, so as to allow them to focus more on content and people, especially in developing countries;
- Establish mandatory, *not voluntary*, Universal Access Funds (like the e-rate in the United States), using some of the tax benefits made by the private sector entities, with mandates to provide public schools and libraries with access to media and ICTs, appropriate software applications and the means to upgrade and maintain them;
- Encourage international financing bodies to coordinate their activities, instead of expecting national entities to do so, and promote inter-sectoral participation in media and ICT programs. The same should apply with respect to implementation and evaluation;
- Consider community media and tele-centres as basic units for rapid response and for the propagation of basic knowledge and practical, readily-useable information, especially with the creation of an "open access" backbone. They should be actively involved in multi-stakeholder partnerships, to elaborate the most cost-effective and broad delivery of public services for information and knowledge.

Partnerships

The actors should work in multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Besides Governments and international Organizations, like Unesco or the World Bank, NGOs specialized in the field of education and research should also be involved (IAMCR, MENTOR, Long-distance teaching organizations,...). Also relevant in the field are professional associations and universities and other lifelong learning institutions (CNED, Open University, IFLA, ICA,...) that have already developed expertise in the field... An observatory or a small coordinating body should be established to arrange for the scaling up of initiatives : it should evaluate the best means to create synergies at different levels of competence for education purposes (hardware, software and human resources).

As for those fora which already exist, like the International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies, they should be helped to promote their work, decisions and materials by making them available beyond their membership proper. These fora are not used to work in a multistakeholder partnership mode, and governance mechanisms should be developed to help them reach this level of multilateralism and multi-partnership.

Principles, norms and rules

Currently there is no overall system or system of rules or norms. The education taskforce, careful to preserve pluralism and cultural diversity for knowledge societies, is very wary of standardization for its own sake, as it may lead to dependence and tunnel vision. Of particular concern to the taskforce is the current trend of the private sector to sign agreements with governments or IOGs that impose proprietary norms and codes to national education systems. Such means of developing access to knowledge increase the dependence on commercial

interests whose scope is not education as the market alone cannot generate education and doesn't protect the local expression of cultural identities and indigenous knowledge. Historically, education has benefited from regulated environments and internet governance should include directives and rules to prevent such enclosure of a global resource.

The education taskforce wishes to establish that each knowledge society should develop its own internationally accredited and validated system, and that internet governance should help only in so far as the equivalencies and the inter-operability of these norms need to be ensured. The distinction between technical standards, which facilitate the effective exchange of information and data-handling, from standards of accreditation and validation, which may be best determined on local and regional bases needs to be clarified and monitored carefully, with the adequate monitoring of legitimate partners.

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