

**WSIS follow-up and implementation:
First Action Line Facilitation meeting
"E-business and e-employment"**

**17 May 2006, 15:00 – 18:00 hours
Palais des Nations, Geneva, Room XXIII**

*Jointly organized by UNCTAD, ITC and ILO
Open to all WSIS stakeholders*

Report

1. As mandated by Paragraph 108 and by the Annex of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, UNCTAD, ILO and ITC jointly organized the first WSIS Follow-up Action Line Facilitation Meeting on "E-business and e-employment". The meeting was held in conjunction with a number of WSIS follow-up events and with the meeting of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.

2. The meeting was open to all WSIS stakeholders interested or involved in the fields related to e-business, e-employment, and the information economy more broadly.

3. The meeting was chaired by Peter Fröhler, Officer-in-Charge of UNCTAD's Division for Services Infrastructure for Development and Trade Efficiency (SITE). Opening statements were made by Mr. José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs, Executive Director for Employment of ILO, Mr. Dirk Bruinsma, Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD, and Mr. Stephen Browne, Deputy Executive Director of ITC.

4. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the multi-stakeholder follow-up and implementation of the WSIS outcomes with respect to e-business and e-employment. In this context, UNCTAD, ILO and ITC as respective interim focal points, shared their common view on contributing as moderators/facilitators to the further implementation process, recognizing the key role of stakeholders from government, civil society, academia and the private sector in shaping, promoting and implementing the process and related projects and programmes.

5. Presentations on WSIS outcomes in the area of e-business and e-employment and on priorities for action and modalities for cooperation were made by UNCTAD, ITC and ILO (Available at http://www.unctadxi.org/templates/Event____6326.aspx).

6. The Executive Director of the WSIS Executive Secretariat, Charles Geiger, gave a short summary of general questions discussed in other Action Line Facilitation meetings:

- The difference between the *formal* WSIS follow-up process and the *informal* implementation process – the latter allowing a flexible organisation and being open to all stakeholders, including the business community.
- Given the overlap with other action lines, the suggestion was made to work along themes rather than along action lines.
- Inside the action lines, sub-themes were identified.
- In most of the meetings, it was decided to build an online platform which includes an electronic database and a discussion forum, and to have another face to face meeting within the following six to twelve months.

7. Congo (Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations) and the Global Alliance for ICT and Development, which will hold its inaugural meeting in Kuala Lumpur in June 2006 and which will be open to all stakeholders, also contributed their views. Both Congo and the Global Alliance emphasized the importance of mainstreaming WSIS and its outcomes into the broader UN agenda, and the need to involve all stakeholders in the discussions. The representative of the business community confirmed their interest in this topic.

8. The following contributions regarding both the implementation process and themes for action were made by stakeholders from government, civil society, academia and the private sector:

Implementation process:

- Cohesion with other action lines, such as enabling environment, is desired.
- Online tools allowing to reach the larger communities and to share the learning and experiences among each other were highly welcomed but need to be integrated.
- The general need to strengthen the role of civil society: The implementation process could fully benefit from its contribution, if civil society were accepted at equal levels and rights. Due to financial constraints, representatives of civil society, in particular of grass root organisations, often cannot participate in and contribute their best practices to international meetings and conferences.
- Synergies with other WSIS follow-up bodies.

Themes for action:

- The creation of e-business should also lead to the creation of employment; the role of innovation in this process.
- SMEs must be in focus, since SMEs hold the major share of total employment. There is a need to include banks financing SMEs into the multi-stakeholder dialogue.
- Focus on gender issues, including the gender divide in business; the general status of women in employment; the need to implement standards (to protect women from interference of local governments and large TNCs); women in productive activities in rural areas, in particular SMEs; the need to ensure that women move up the value chain.
- The need to create an enabling environment for the information economy, including training and access to technologies and opportunities created by e-commerce, as well as a basic legal framework for teleworking.
- The introduction of standardised indicators, disaggregated by gender and age.
- Focus should not be on international trade only, but also on the domestic dimension (e-business within a country; local trade, local supply chains and clusters).
- E-commerce: Solutions for people who don't have bank accounts.
- The Digital divide is about content – there is a need to transfer the content; this is linked to intellectual property rights.
- The need to implement special activities to overcome the digital divide in rural areas. ICTs for poverty reduction also need to be taken into account.
- The role of broadband and the need to expand it.

9. The international organizations proposed to establish a tool that facilitates the dialogue among all stakeholders. On behalf of the international organizations, the ILO presented a proposal for a community of practice (Available at http://www.unctadxi.org/templates/Event____6326.aspx).

10. ILO and UNCTAD encouraged participants to attend the UNCTAD Expert Meeting on "Using ICTs to achieve growth and development", jointly organized by UNCTAD, OECD and ILO which will take place from 4 to 5 December 2006 in Geneva.