Summary of the Session 1 "WSIS Action Lines and the 2030 Agenda"

1. Introduction

The resolution of the United Nations General Assembly on the overall review of the outcomes of WSIS, adopted in December last year, called for close alignment between the WSIS process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The resolution highlighted the cross cutting contribution that ICT can make to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) noting that access to SDGs is both the means and the ends to development.

To this end, however, the resolution also expressed five major concerns: 1) that existing digital divides prevail and new divides emerge; 2) that the ubiquitous use of ICT must be based on new levels of confidence and security; 3) that the rights of individuals must be protected equally on-line and off-line; 4) that the progress brought in by ICT should be measured not only in economic terms, but also in terms of the realization of human rights and freedoms; and 5) that to serve as a development enabler, ICT must be grounded in ethical foundations. It is against this background that the session was held.

2. Vision

The session has once again highlighted the potential of ICT to bridge the digital divides, to develop knowledge societies, and to serve as an enabler for sustainable development.

3. Fresh Priorities

Fresh priorities include promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, e.g. through creating virtual spaces and providing access to advanced technologies, as well as fighting cyber-crime by adopting and implementing cyber security policies.

4. Emerging trends

Innovation and micro-spaces for inventors and entrepreneurs are appearing across Africa. African innovators are showing increasing leadership, while payment and money remittance services provide enabling conditions for entrepreneurs.

There is a need to move towards collaborative regulation and collaborative policies. We can no longer afford to have vertical policies and regulations.

5. Opportunities

Access is expanding and ICTs become more available, cheap and integrated into every aspect of our lives, in turn expanding opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Governments could create incentives, including funding, for ICT innovators to come up with new public service solutions, including birth and car registrations, sanitation, etc.

Setting up affordable social rates for Internet access could create opportunities for creating jobs in small settlements, and accessing affordable e-healthcare, e-education, and e-services.

6.   Key Challenges

We need legislation and rules, as well as incentives and capital, for innovation to grow. The key challenges faced by governments is developing ecosystems and the necessary legal frameworks to offer services that are legally accepted and secure. Another challenge is to strengthen ICT communities in those countries that do not have them, e.g. through professional societies that contribute to developing and sharing knowledge with SMEs.

One of the key challenge of the modern diplomacy is building inclusive solutions. If the worldwide population is to be engaged and follow the global rules on climate change, sustainable development, Internet governance, etc. we need high ownership of what was agreed globally and we need engagement. The key challenge is increasing the inclusiveness of the policy processes, and the involvement of small and developing states.

Modern diplomacy is also challenged by the dichotomy between discretion and transparency. If peaceful resolution of conflicts requires the discretion of negotiation, and reaching compromises, we should allow it. Sometimes transparency could be counterproductive, as in many cultures compromise may be seen as loosing face.

7.   Link with the WSIS Action Lines and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Network infrastructure is clearly required for advancing progress on the majority of the SDGs and broadband access can directly impact development. For example, ending poverty will be greatly advanced if the extreme poor have access to basic financial services that help them manage economic shocks and build wealth, including insurance, loans and microcredits. This can be done if they have and use mobile phones.

The principles of multi-stakeholder engagement that characterized the WSIS process has been validated. The effective participation and cooperation of governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, technical and academic communities and other stakeholders, especially with balanced representations from developing countries continue to be vital in developing the information society.

A key condition for achieving the SDGs is the strengthening of local capacities, particularly the capacity of ICT professionals and ICT communities.

8.   Case Examples

Guinea-Bissau is involved in designing a regional West African health information system to take advantage of data generated over cell phones and SMS applications. The aim is to reach

out to the poorest in a cost-effective manner to understand their health challenges and turn this information into adaptable health policies.

Guinea-Bissau is also promoting mobile payment services based on which commercial banks offer loans, microcredit, savings, and other financial products and services.

Russia signed a special addition to the federal law on telecommunications concerning the provision of the universal service fund. The goal is to connect in the upcoming four or five years all small villages and settlements with populations of over 250 people with fiber optics. This will involve installing 215,000 kilometers of the fiber optics on land or through submarine cables. 1.2% of the telecom operators' revenues are dedicated to this fund.

ICT graduates are beginning to run successful IT companies in Nigeria. For example, a company called Jumer has a lot of successful in Internet-based e-Commerce. The company was founded by young persons who obtained bank loans to start.

9.   Road ahead

Building partnerships is necessary. Where ICT communities do not exist, industry and governments share the responsibility to build them, helping with establishment, creating international linkages, and strengthening local expertise, knowledge sharing and cooperation. Governments could also put in place policies to ensure that banks set up a portion of their loans or financial supports to SMEs. The SDGs are about leaving no one behind. The further this goal, our role is to ensure that no one is left off-line.