ITU-D and WSIS

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has been working towards the building of an Information Society for the past 137 years. The organization's broad-based membership that has grown from the original 20 in 1865 to the current 189 Member States and 650 Sector Members bears testimony to the pivotal role that the organization has played in bringing digital opportunities to society. ITU's strength lies in its responsiveness to the needs of the membership and its ability to continuously evolve in response to the dictates of the external environment. It is in part, these attributes that have led to the emergence of the ITU's current structure that is described below:

- The General Secretariat: coordinates the Union's activities.

- The Radiocommunication Sector: plays a vital role in the management of the radio-frequency spectrum and satellite orbits, finite natural resources which are increasingly in demand from a large number of services such as fixed, mobile, broadcasting, amateur, space research, meteorology, global positioning systems, environmental monitoring and last but not least, those communications services that ensure safety of life at sea and in the skies.

- The Standardization Sector: ensures an efficient and on-time production of high quality standards covering all fields of telecommunications.

- The Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D): cooperates with the other arms of the Union in fulfilling the dual responsibility of ITU as a specialized agency and executing agency for implementing projects under the United Nations development system or other funding arrangements so as to facilitate and enhance telecommunications development by offering, organizing and coordinating technical cooperation and assistance activities.

ITU-D works through Telecommunication Development Conferences, their associated Development Study Groups, the Regional Telecommunication Development Conferences, the Telecommunications Development Advisory Group and the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT). The Director of the BDT, who is one of the five elected officials of ITU, is the secretary of the Telecommunication Development Sector. The Development Sector provides support for practically all fields in the telecommunication/Information Communication Technology (ICT) network, service and application domains.

The third World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), organized by the ITU every four years, was held in Istanbul, Turkey in March 2002. The previous one was held in Valetta (Malta) in 1998 and adopted a six-programme action plan known as the Valetta Action Plan (VAP), which has been in the process of implementation since 1999. WTDC-02 addressed the issue of the Digital Divide at several levels and adopted an action plan to bridge this divide.

As the world's largest and highest-level global conference on telecommunication development, WTDC-02 brought together 1'150 participants representing 152 countries and generated over 250 documents conveying ITU Members' proposals for strategies to be implemented in the development period from 2003-2006.[1]

A special session on the Digital Divide was organized, providing a unique opportunity to the participants to hear position statements delivered by senior level officials from governments, private institutions and other organizations. The session identified strategies to close the divide in both developing and developed countries. The role of governments, particularly in their effort to create enabling frameworks and to exert political will to push through digital divide initiatives, was highlighted. The session also recognized the role of ITU as one of the leading agencies in closing the gap between information 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Recognition was also given to regional initiatives aimed at extending the use of ICTs to bring the benefits to people with special needs, through societal services and applications.

WTDC-02 results included:

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[1] See the associated ITU Press Release, "World Telecommunication Development Conference adopts comprehensive Action Plan to bridge the Digital Divide." 27 March 2002. http://www.itu.int/newsroom/press_releases/2002/11.html

- the *Istanbul Declaration*, a document put forward by members setting goals and objectives;

- the *ITU-D Strategic Plan* which outlines the vision for the future, charts the course, and identifies the strategies for the next four years (2003-2006); and

- the *Istanbul Action Plan* (IsAP) which focuses on:
    1. ways to strengthen cooperation amongst members through regional meetings/conferences, consultative development groups and participation in study groups;
    2. full support for regional initiatives aimed at closing the divide;
    3. targeted resolutions and recommendations;
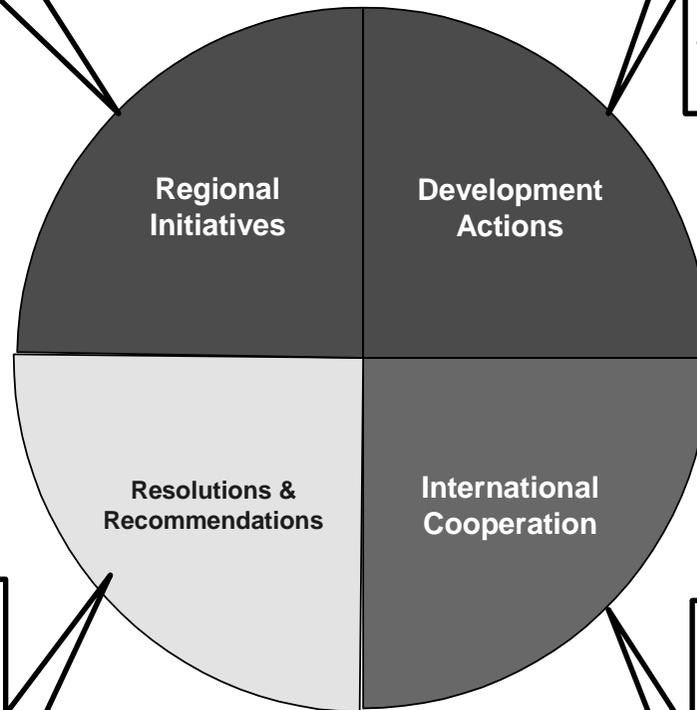   4. and, IsAP development actions (see figure below).

Six programmes were adopted covering regulatory reform, telecommunication network development, e-strategies and e-services, economics and finance, human capacity building, and a special programme for least developed countries. These six programmes are the basic ingredients for the development of telecommunication networks and ICTs. They provide the mechanisms and the mandate for ITU to provide assistance in creating a conducive environment for telecommunication development, foster the development of the core infrastructure, bring the benefits of ICTs to all sectors of developing countries, provide assistance in the investment framework through economic and financial studies, build local capacity through human resources development, and pay special attention to the needs of least developed countries.

In addition to these programmes, WTDC-02 decided that information sharing remains a constant and key factor to better understand and develop strategies for shrinking the Digital Divide. In the same context, it was found necessary to continue to build strong and mutually beneficial partnerships with other stakeholders to develop synergies and avoid duplication of efforts. In order to work towards a truly global information society that is inclusive, special initiatives were adopted to address the concerns of youth, gender and indigenous people. They too, must be given an equal chance to benefit from the potential of ICTs.

THE Istanbul Action Plan (IsAP)

(To bridge the Digital Divide)

Regional initiatives reflect both the role of the ITU/BDT as an Executive Agency to support project engineering in one hand, and the recognition by its membership of the need to liase with other initiatives taken by other organisations but concurring to the common goal of bridging the digital divide by fostering a larger use of ICT in the other hand, with a view to avoid duplications and encourage a more coordinated use of resources available to the sector.

- The Development Actions include the IsAP Programmes, Activities and Initiatives;
- The IsAp six programmes are: Regulatory Reform, Technologies and Telecommunication Networks Development, e-Strategies and e-Services/Applications, Economics & Finance, Human capacity building and a Special Programme for Least Developed Ccountries;
- the two crosscutting activities are Information & Statistics and Partnership&Promotion;
- Four initiatives are identified: gender, youth, indigenous people and private sector issues.

Regional Initiatives

Development Actions

Resolutions & Recommendations

International Cooperation

- 38 Resolutions and 5 Recommendations incorporated by reference in the Programmes and Activities;
- Most of them are recalling strategies recommended by the membership to bridge the Digital Didive;
- Resolution 30 (Istanbul, 2002) defines the role of ITU-D in the preparation for WSIS

- International Cooperation addresses the mechanism by which the Development Sector in the ITU is open to inputs directly provided by its members:
- The **W**orld **T**elecommunication **D**evelopment **C**onference is the highest level forum where Member States and Sector Members define the priorities for the next 4 years
- **R**egional **T**elecommunication **D**evelopment **C**onferences play the same role within a Development Region
- The **S**tudy **G**roups consolidate voluntary intellectual contributions of members in order to elaborate policies and guidelines and trends for the benefit of policy makers, regulatory authorities, operators and other stakeholders;
- The **T**elecommunications **D**evelopment **A**dvisory **G**roup advises the Director of the BDT twice a year.
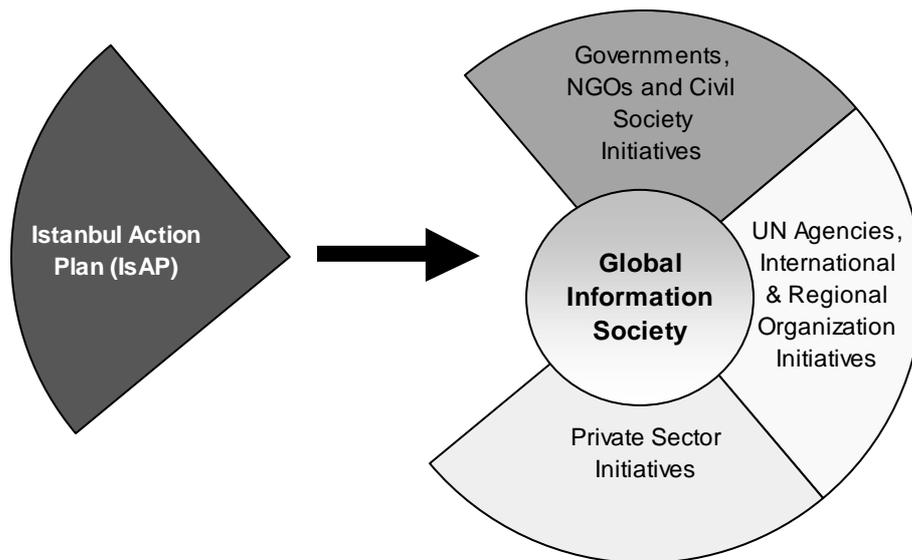
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The World Summit on the Information Society

The General Assembly of the United Nations, in its Resolution 56/183 of 21 December 2001, welcomed the resolution of the Council of the International Telecommunication Union in which the Council endorsed the proposal put forward by the Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union for the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society. The General Assembly also invited the International Telecommunication Union to assume the leading managerial role in the Executive Secretariat of the Summit and its preparatory process, in cooperation with other interested organizations and partners. The General Assembly further recommended that preparations for the Summit take place through an open-ended intergovernmental preparatory committee that would define the agenda of the Summit, finalize both the draft declaration and the draft plan of action, and decide on the modalities of the participation of other stakeholders in the Summit. The following are some of the proposed themes for the WSIS resulting from the first meeting of the preparatory committee that was held in Geneva from 1 to 5 July 2002:[2]

- Infrastructure: financing, deployment and sustainability.

- Identifying and overcoming barriers to the achievement of the information society.

- The role of government, the business sector and civil society in the promotion of ICTs for development.

- Education, human resources development and training.

- Access to information and communication technologies.

- Information network security.

- Development of a policy and regulatory framework.

- ICT applications (education, health, culture, poverty eradication, government, employment, business).

The Istanbul Action Plan is a roadmap for developing an action plan for the Global Information Society. There is a direct correlation between the programmes and other decisions adopted by the World Telecommunication Development conference at Istanbul and the proposed themes for WSIS.

Even though IsAP is a core ingredient for the WSIS Action Plan, it is only part of the solution. ITU cannot play this role alone. It needs to work with all the main stakeholders from governments, civil society, NGOs, United Nations and its specialized agencies, international, regional and national organizations and with the private sector (see Figure).

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[2] The WSIS themes were outlined in the Report of the First Meeting of the Preparatory Committee.

The two-phased approach for the World Summit on the Information Society (in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005) provides ample opportunities to build on these synergies.

The following recommendations propose ideas for working towards an Action Plan for the World Summit on the Information Society:

1. The Istanbul Action Plan should be considered an integral part of the Action Plan resulting from WSIS;

2. WSIS needs to be used as a catalyst to boost development activities worldwide;

3. WSIS should provide a platform for cooperation among members and all stakeholders;

4. And finally, it highlights the 'win-win' opportunities provided by early involvement of relevant parties because this will foster awareness and build stronger synergies.

5. Create within the ITU a "Information Society Action Plan Team" (ITU-IS) which would consolidate the contributions of the ITU Sectors and other bodies around the IsAP ; its work should be completed before PrepCom2 whose tentative date is February 2003.

6. Suggest to the HLSOC the creation of an HLSOC "Information Society Action Plan Team" (HLSOC-IS) which will be entitled to prepare both the Declaration on Information Society and the ISAP; its work should be completed before PrepCom3 whose tentative date is September 2003.

Implementation of Resolution 30 (Istanbul,2002)

ROLE OF THE ITU-D IN THE PREPARATION FOR THE WSIS
AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS RESOLUTIONS.

RESOLVES	First LEVEL	SECOND LEVEL	ACTION ENGAGED
to invite the ITU-D	to work in cooperation with other development partners (governments, specialized agencies of the United Nations, relevant international and regional organizations, etc.) with a view to successful preparation for the World Summit through a clear programme and an appropriate mechanism for coordination among the different partners concerned at the national, regional, interregional and global levels, having particular regard to the needs of the developing and least developed countries, including in the field of building the information infrastructure;		Presentation of the Istanbul Action Plan to the first WSIS preparatory committee (PrepCom1) in order to show the mechanisms by which the IsAP includes external initiatives on ICT development conducted by other bodies. Preparation of this background document and coordination with General Secretariat on collaboration with other development partners. Support for regional preparatory meetings.
	to adopt forthwith a comprehensive programme, building upon the programme previously proposed, for implementation of the information society infrastructure at the national, regional, interregional and global levels, without awaiting the Summit resolutions, in order to expedite preparation of the basic infrastructure for the information society, without which the digital divide cannot be bridged;		Six programmes were adopted by WTDC02 focusing on ways and means to foster the development of ICT including basic infrastructure. The implementation of those programmes is only subject to PP02 budget allocation for the next 4 years, starting 2003.
	to encourage the principle of non-exclusion from the information society and to devise an appropriate mechanism to this end;		WTDC02 adopted Resolution 20(Rev.Istanbul, 2002) – Non discriminatory access to modern telecommunication facilities and services
	to create a climate favourable to encouraging ITU-D Sector Members, as well as the private sector, to invest in developing the information infrastructure, encompassing rural, isolated and remote regions, through different technologies, including satellite technology, which, in many cases, may be the ideal solution;		Fostering the creation of an environment conducive to investment for the development of infrastructure use all relevant technologies is one of the main goals of the programmes 1 and 4 of the IsAP in particular.
	to pursue its activities to assist developing countries in advancing their regulatory structure in order to further the goal of building the information infrastructure;		See above.
	to pursue its activities in the field of statistical work for telecommunication development, using the indicators required to evaluate progress in this area with a view to bridging the digital divide;		In addition to the six programmes, IsAP includes, among others, an Activity named Information & Statistics which will pursue the assessment of ICT development worldwide.
	to formulate the ITU-D strategic plan, taking into account the need to give priority to building the information infrastructure at the national, regional, interregional and global levels and also make this one of the main goals of the Global Telecommunication University;		The ITU-D Strategic Plan as adopted by WTDC02 has given the necessary priority to the development of infrastructure in particular in the least served countries.

RESOLVES	First LEVEL	SECOND LEVEL	ACTION ENGAGED
	to formulate development programmes, taking into account the substance of this resolution;		The development programmes can be consulted from the WTDC02 Report at the following address: http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/isap/WTDC-02FinalReport/index.html
	to propose at the forthcoming plenipotentiary conference appropriate mechanisms for funding these activities, including in addition the following:	the budget required to expand Internet training programmes;	➢ Telecom Surplus used as seed money to attract partners ➢ Financial Plan 2004-2007
		the budget required to cover the activities of the electronic commerce project;	➢ Telecom Surplus used as seed money to attract partners ➢ Financial Plan 2004-2007
		the budget required to cover the activities of the Internet Protocol telephony project;	Financial Plan 2004-2007 as adopted by PP02: Regular budget through Programme 3 and Study Groups.
		adequate nominal finance to establish a fund to help the private sector in the developing countries, through incubators, to prepare databases in these countries and any other activities of benefit in the utilization of the information infrastructure;	➢ Resource mobilization and partnership with other Technology Parks. ➢ Financial Plan 2004-2007 as adopted by PP02 : the development of relevant ITU ICT database is underway in the head quarter and in regional offices; those can be linked with other local initiatives.
		adequate nominal finance for cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) in the field of telemedicine, in regard to establishing the telecommunication infrastructure which serves this aim;	PP02 may wish to provide additional resources to Section IV of the IsAP.
		any other activities adopted by this conference;	It is expected that members reflect these wishes in the ITU-D chapter of the Financial Plan to be adopted by PP02.
	to affirm in each and every one of these activities full gender equality and regard for those with special needs, including disabled persons and invalids,		Gender, Youth and indigenous people are identified in each of the programmes adopted by WTDC02. In addition, WTDC02 adopted: ➢ Resolution44 (Istanbul,2002) for Gender Issues; ➢ Resolution38 (Istanbul,2002) for Youth issues; and ➢ Recommendation 5(Rev.Istanbul,2002) for indigenous people.