Canada

A   Vision

Canada's vision of the global information society is one that includes all people. We believe that everyone has the potential to participate in the information society, and that people everywhere should have opportunities to benefit from the possibilities it brings in all areas of human life. These benefits include improved governance, sustainable economic development, strengthened social cohesion, expanded knowledge and new forms of cultural expression.

In preparing for the World Summit on the Information Society, we should recognize that our future depends on deriving these universal benefits from information-related activities that are – or can become – common to people everywhere.

The information society should be a society of shared abundance, since it is based on the most widely distributed elements in the human universe – elements such as intelligence, creativity, self-expression, empathy, understanding, the sense of justice, and a natural desire to communicate.

We are very far from realizing this vision.

In today's world,

- there are enormous disparities in people's rights, capacities and opportunities to access, create, communicate, use and benefit from information and knowledge;

- there are equally enormous disparities in people's access to and capacity to use the electronic information and communication technologies (ICTs) that allow us to perform these activities on a scale and with a speed that has never been possible before.

As the Beijing +5 Conference on Women recognized, the world community faces particularly important challenges in closing the "gender divide, as part of the broader global effort to close the "digital divide". While women are increasingly taking advantage of ICTs in all spheres of life, the number of women users is lower compared to men, and it is apparent that there is a persistence of gender specific structural inequalities that form barriers to access. In particular, persistent inequalities between men and women at all levels of decision-making constitute serious constraints to women's participation in shaping the role of ICTs as a tool for development.

Beyond this gender divide, there is growing international recognition that the digital divide is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that not only separates developed and developing countries, but also separates groups of people within countries – whatever their level of development – on the

basis of factors such as wealth, geographical location, cultural and linguistic heritage, and mental and physical ability.

The progress of ICTs has been so spectacular that it is sometimes possible to become mesmerized by technology, and to believe that it offers a magic solution for all the world's problems. As we prepare for WSIS, we must always remember that the challenge of building an inclusive global information society is about more than providing universal access to ICTs – although achieving this goal is an essential prerequisite.

Fundamentally, our challenge is to create new approaches to poverty alleviation and sustainable development – approaches that harness technological means to development ends, by empowering people and involving them in decisions about how ICTs should be developed, deployed and used.

To create these new approaches, we must be fully aware of the profound changes that are taking place in the structure of economic, social, cultural and governance activities as the world moves into the information society. We must also carefully analyze what these changes mean for the global development enterprise.

The magnitude of these challenges makes it all the more important to keep our focus on people – on their development needs, on the human rights and fundamental freedoms all of us should enjoy, and on the obligations and responsibilities we bear to each other. ***The principles we adopt and the models we design must put people first***.

In preparing for WSIS it is also important to keep in mind that, although governments and international organizations hold many of the keys to unlocking the power of ICTs, it is mainly other stakeholders – individuals, private and public organizations, communities and collectivities – that create economic, social and cultural wealth out of technology, information and knowledge resources.

For WSIS to succeed, its vision must reach

- beyond technology – to embrace the development goals set out in the Millennium Declaration in order to map out new ways of achieving them;

- beyond information – to encompass creativity, knowledge, and understanding and the measures required to nurture and promote their universal development;

- beyond government – to mobilize not only the private sector and civil society, but ordinary communities, families, groups and individuals.

WSIS represents a unique opportunity to address issues related to the information society and to create an awareness of the importance of ICTs for development among world leaders. It has the potential to set a global policy agenda for years to come. With the two-phased structure of the Summit, it will be possible to refine this agenda, to assess progress, and to take the action needed to ensure that the WSIS vision, declaration of principles and plan of action are implemented.

To do this, it will be important to build upon the momentum that has already been established by activities such as the G8 Digital Opportunities Task Force and the United Nations ICT Task Force, and to maintain this momentum as we progress from Phase I to Phase II of the Summit.

B   Principles

On the basis of this vision, its national experience, and its extensive work with developing countries, Canada proposes the following **principles** to guide **governments** *in partnership with civil society, the private sector, and international organizations*.

- to ensure that all communities and people have affordable access to communications networks and services (e.g. through universal service funds, by authorizing or establishing community tele-centres);

- to promote affordable public access to computers, applications and electronic information services (e.g. via cybercafés, community access points);

- to facilitate access to culturally relevant and linguistically diversified information;

5.   Fostering the Creation, Preservation and Digitization of Local Content – Governments and their partners should:

- support and stimulate creative endeavours to develop software, applications and content in local languages, which respond to local needs, embody local knowledge and reflect local perspectives, including the diverse perspectives of women;

- support and strengthen research and development capacity in the creation and development of tools and platforms that enable content production.

6.   Building New Partnerships, Increasing International Cooperation, and Promoting Cross-Cultural Dialogue – Governments should:

- consult with the private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholder groups when developing policies, laws and regulations for the information and communications sector;

- establish working partnerships with the private sector and civil society in order to enhance access to ICT networks, equipment and services, as well as to stimulate the development of local software, applications and content;

- cooperate with each other on a south-south and south-north basis – both bilaterally and within the framework of relevant regional and international organizations – to develop cooperative approaches to implementing information society principles and actions;

- coordinate the actions of all relevant international organizations and fora in which they participate, with a view to enabling, facilitating and promoting the development of the information society on a worldwide basis.

7.   Encouraging Community Involvement and Empowerment – In developing action plans to implement the foregoing principles, governments – in collaboration with the private sector and civil society – should place special emphasis on community-based initiatives, since it is at the community level that the challenges and opportunities of developing an inclusive global information society are most tangible for ordinary individuals. Community-based initiatives should include actions aimed at:

- geographical communities, especially those living in rural and remote areas, and the urban poor;

- women and demographic groups that are relatively disadvantaged, such as youth, indigenous peoples, and people with physical and mental disabilities;

- virtual communities of interest (e.g. educators, health care workers).

C   Plan of Action

Canada's experience suggests that, in order to build an inclusive information society, it is necessary to apply the principles set out in the previous section holistically, comprehensively and systematically to the main sectors of national development and global cooperation.

Our experience also suggests that *government must play a leading, practical role in building the information society* – in addition to discharging its fundamental responsibility for creating a policy and regulatory environment that encourages economic and social development through innovation and private investment.

In all countries – whatever their level of development – government is a major producer and consumer of information products and services. Government can therefore provide a powerful stimulus to the emergence of an information society by using ICTs to support democratic governance processes, as well as to improve access to key public services such as education and health care.

In Canada's experience, the use of ICTs in education is a particularly important strategy for building an information society.

Programs that have placed computers in public schools and libraries and connected them to the Internet have created new learning and teaching opportunities within the formal education system. At the same time, they have provided benefits that go well beyond the classroom. These initiatives have stimulated entrepreneurship among the young; created business opportunities for the ICT sector; and provided all members of the community served by a school or library with opportunities to learn about ICTs, as well as to access information and knowledge resources.

Government leadership, private initiative, and community involvement provide a powerful basis for building the information society. In many developing countries, however, more is needed. *Donor organizations must also play a key role*. Canada fully supports the principles set out in the OECD (DAC) report *Shaping the Twenty-First Century: The Contribution of Development Assistance*, as they apply to ICTs. These principles include:

- *local ownership* – development strategies must be developed by recipient countries – their governments and people – and must reflect their priorities;

- *improved donor coordination* – with recipient countries bearing the main responsibility for coordinating their development cooperation with other countries and institutions;

- *stronger partnerships* – through the development of compacts that would identify the responsibilities of developing countries and their external partners;

- *a results-based approach* – with improved monitoring and evaluation of development programs;

- *greater coherence* – in "non-aid" policies of industrialized countries that can have profound effects on the developing world (e.g. policies on trade, investment and technology transfer).

In addition, in developing a draft plan of action for building a global information society, Canada believes that it is important for the WSIS preparatory process to *build on the excellent work already done by the G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force (the DOT Force) and the UN ICT Task Force*. These initiatives have identified many of the main challenges facing developing and developed countries. They have also provided models for establishing effective working partnerships between government, the private sector, civil society, and international organizations.

Bearing in mind all of the foregoing considerations, Canada proposes that the WSIS Plan of Action should contain **a planning framework** that can be used by governments and their development partners to apply the principles proposed in § B to the main challenges facing countries in building the information society. To varying degrees, these challenges face all countries, whatever their level of development. **The Summit should, however, pay particular attention to the needs of developing countries**.

Key Themes

In Canada's view, the main **themes** that should be addressed in the WSIS Plan of Action include the following:

1. *Good Governance* – The governance challenge facing all countries in the information society, but particularly developing countries, has two principal dimensions. **First**, the establishment, advancement and protection of all **human rights and fundamental freedoms**, including opinion, expression, and association. **Second**, the establishment of **democratic governance institutions and processes, including access to information,** that provide opportunities for all individuals and stakeholders to participate in the development and to monitor the implementation of policies, laws and regulations. Of particular interest are the new possibilities for democratic participation that are enabled by ICTs.

Suggested Actions:

- Develop laws and regulations to establish and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including opinion, expression, and association.

- Establish institutions and processes that inform, consult and engage individuals and stakeholders in development of policies, laws regulations, including access to information.

- Use electronic media and public access points (e.g. broadcasting, the Internet, community tele-centres in schools and libraries) to inform individuals, to engage stakeholders, and to facilitate access to democratic processes so that all points of view on an issue are heard.

- Learn from the democratic governance experience of other countries, on both a south-south and north-south basis, as well as take advantage of assistance provided by international organizations.

- Develop regional strategies and fora for promoting democratic governance processes.

2. *National Development Strategies* – In the information society, the challenge facing countries is to include "E-strategies" in their national development plans. E-strategies should be developed in consultation with all relevant stakeholder groups as well as the general public, and should be linked to the achievement of development goals (e.g. the MDGs). In formulating E-strategies, governments should learn from experiences of other countries and take advantage of assistance provided by international organizations.

Suggested Actions:

- Establish an enabling legal, regulatory and policy framework, including self-regulatory mechanisms.

- Develop national communication infrastructures by enacting policies, laws and regulations that promote the development of electronic communication networks, provide universal access to services at affordable prices, and protect intellectual property and the rights of users to reasonable and affordable access to information and knowledge.

- Develop individual and organizational capacity to use ICTs to access, create and communicate information, as well as to apply it in furtherance of economic and social development.

- Develop policies to stimulate the preservation, creation and digitization of local content and the development of local applications.

- Develop national and regional strategies for participating in international ICT fora on issues relevant to economic and social development.

- Adopt measures to protect privacy and security.

3. ***Economic Prosperity*** – All countries face two main economic challenges in the global information society. The first is to use ICTs to increase the productivity and international competitiveness of their current economic activities. The second is to use ICTs to create new products and services that can be offered on local, national and international markets – including those produced by the "cultural industries". In addressing these challenges, countries should learn from the experience of countries that have developed e-commerce strategies.

Suggested Actions:

- Develop laws and regulations to facilitate E-business (e.g. digital signatures, security of information, personal privacy, incentives to use productivity-enhancing technologies in all sectors).

- Provide training in the use of ICTs to improve business productivity, as well as to support entrepreneurs and enterprises in creating new products and services.

- Develop policies and regulations designed to promote universal affordable access to ICTs, including the Internet, and monitor and assess their impact on the promotion of economic and social development and the reduction of inequalities.

- Assist with strategies for local research and development in adapting international software, content and applications to the needs of local markets, as well as in adapting local content to the international market.

- Share best practices in technologies and applications that support the global information society vision.

4. ***Education and Public Services*** – All countries should work towards using ICTs to improve education and other public services, by making them available to communities and individuals that were previously excluded or not well served (e.g. distance education, tele-health, virtual museums), as well as by using them to improve the efficiency and quality of the services provided to all individuals**.**

Suggested Actions:

- Develop laws, regulations and programs that promote universal access to education, provide opportunities for job-related training and life long learning, and promote the application of ICTs to the delivery of social programs and public services (e.g. distance education, tele-health, e-government).

- Provide training in the use of ICTs to improve the efficiency and quality of public services.

- Lever public investments in service delivery to promote the extension of affordable access to networks and services to all individuals.

- Ensure that individuals' right to privacy and confidentiality of personal information is protected in the design of e-government service delivery and consultative mechanisms.

5. ***Cultural Expression*** –. ICTs provide creators, cultural industries and cultural organizations with opportunities to develop new forms of cultural expression that reflect local cultures and are a catalyst to expanding cultural and social linkages. ICTs also offer new opportunities to promote and preserve both tangible and intangible elements of the cultural heritage, and to share cultural knowledge at all levels from local to global. Creating content that reflects local cultures or broader communities of interest is one of the greatest challenges facing all societies, and is a particular challenge for developing countries. In the information society, the preservation and development of linguistic diversity and cultural identity should be a priority.

Suggested Actions:

- Provide training in the application of ICTs to various forms of cultural expression and encourage use of appropriate technologies to communicate local information (e.g. community radio).

- Establish programs that promote the development of software, applications and content that support local languages, capture local knowledge, and provide local perspectives;

- Consider pooling resources on a regional basis or on the basis of shared cultural heritage and interest (e.g. networks of e-culture observatories to support the development of cultural policies).

- Support heritage organizations as agents for interpreting, presenting and preserving cultural expression, as well as artists, authors and the performing arts as creators of cultural expression.

- Develop programs that promote the use of ICTs to preserve and promote cultural expression, notably through the digitization of cultural content.

ANNEX A – *Towards a Model Plan of Action*

Canada believes that the challenges facing developing and developed countries, international organizations, the private sector and civil society in building a global information society would be better understood if a reference model was included in the WSIS Plan of Action.

The purpose of this model would be to illustrate the types of practical action that would have to be taken in order to systematically apply information society principles of the kind proposed by Canada to the main development challenges facing all countries, but most particularly developing countries.

The matrix that follows provides an example of what a model plan of action might look like by consolidating the seven principles and five themes proposed in Canada's contribution to PrepCom-2. Through the identification of a general action item in each cell, the matrix offers an illustration of the potential first-level impact of adopting the proposed principles and themes.

In a normal planning cycle, the general action items listed in the matrix would be followed by more detailed action items or plans, such as specific programs, activities or projects.   Thus, this matrix framework provides a systematic first level examination of what a list of principles and themes could mean for governments and their partners once applied.

The Application of Information Society Principles to Development Challenges: Towards a Model Plan of Action

Themes / Principles	Governance	National Development Strategies	Economy	Education and Public Services	Culture
Promote Democratic Government and Governance **Create an Enabling Environment for the Information Society**	Laws and regulations to establish and support respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of opinion, expression and association Institutions and processes, including access to information, that inform, consult and engage individuals and stakeholders in development of policies, laws regulations	Laws and regulations that promote the development of electronic communication networks, and universal affordable access to services Laws and regulations that protect intellectual property and the rights of users to reasonable and affordable access information and knowledge	Laws and regulations to facilitate E-commerce (e.g. digital signatures, security of information, personal privacy, incentives to use productivity-enhancing technologies in all sectors)	Laws, regulations and programs that promote universal access to education and provide opportunities for job-related training and life long learning Programs that promote the application of ICTs to the delivery of social and public services (e.g. distance education, tele-health, e-government)	Laws and regulations that balance respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms while protecting important public interests.
Develop Human Capacity through Education and Training	Include education in human rights, democratic process and social responsibility in the curriculum from the earliest stages	Provide education and training in the use of electronic information and communication technologies	Provide training in the use of ICTs to improve business productivity, as well as support entrepreneurs and enterprises in making full use of ICTs	Provide training in the use of ICTs to improve the efficiency and quality of public services	Provide training in the application of ICTs to various forms of cultural expression
Increase Access to Information and to Communication Infrastructures	Use of electronic media (e.g. broadcasting, the Internet) to inform individuals, to engage stakeholders, to support democratic political processes Facilitate access for different groups so that all points of view on an issue are heard	Ensure that national strategies address the development potential of all ICTs, including traditional broadcasting and telecommunications as well as the Internet and mobile communications	Include Internet access in policies and regulations designed to promote universal affordable access to such services	Since social and public services are potentially one of the largest customers for electronic networks, lever public investments in service delivery to promote the extension of affordable access to networks and services to all individuals	Use of appropriate technologies (e.g. community radio) to communicate local information
Foster the Creation of Local Content	Ensure that individuals and stakeholder groups are informed of issues up for decision and of the process by which decisions will be made, so that they will have an opportunity to input if they wish	Include the economic and social benefit potential of developing electronic software, applications and content in national development strategies	Assist in adapting international software, content and applications to the needs of local markets, as well as in adapting local content to the international market	Ensure that individuals' right to privacy and confidentiality of personal information is protected in the design of e-government service delivery and consultative mechanisms	Programs that promote the development of software, applications and content in local languages, capture local knowledge, and provide local perspectives

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Principles	Governance	National Development Strategies	Economy	Education and Public Services	Culture
Build New Partnerships	When framing and introducing legal and regulatory reforms, inform, consult and engage all individuals so that they will understand their rights, freedoms and responsibilities	Inform, consult and engage all stakeholder groups in the formulation of national strategy	Create E-commerce roundtables that include representatives of business and consumer interests to assist in the development of policies, laws, regulations and programs	Ensure effective collaboration between different government departments and agencies involved in e-service delivery so that standard technologies and interfaces are used and the services of different providers interoperate seamlessly	Encourage collaboration between different media of artistic expression so that audiences have opportunities to access local content through the communication channels available to them
Increase Cooperation	Take advantage of assistance provided by international organizations in formulating fundamental information laws and regulations and designing democratic governance processes	Take advantage of assistance provided by international organizations in formulating e-strategies	Take advantage of assistance provided by international organizations in formulating E-commerce policies and strategies	Take advantage of assistance provided by international organizations in developing e-government service delivery	Take advantage of assistance provided by international organizations in applying ICTs to cultural expression
	Learn from the democratic governance experience of other countries, on both a south-south and north-south basis	Learn from the experience of countries that have developed e-strategies, on both a south-south and north-south basis	Learn from the experience of countries that have developed E-commerce strategies on both a south-south and north-south basis	Learn from the experience of countries that have implemented e-government on both a south-south and north-south basis	Learn from experience of other countries that have used ICTs to promote local cultural expression, on both a south-south and north-south basis
	Develop regional strategies and fora for promoting democratic governance processes	Develop national and regional strategies for participating in international ICT fora on issues relevant to development	Develop regional and shared interest approaches to negotiating international E-commerce agreements	Consider pooling resources with other countries when providing cross-border public services (e.g. customs, immigration, tourism)	Consider pooling resources on a sub-regional or regional basis, or on the basis of shared cultural heritage and interest
Encourage Community Involvement and Empower Communities	*Include community-based development initiatives in all sectoral action plans*				