

## Research Article

# Understanding WSIS: An Institutional Analysis of the UN World Summit on the Information Society

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The Cold War's end stimulated new interest in a long-standing UN institution: the World Summit. World summits are one-time conferences organized by the UN to address global issues such as environment, housing, or food. They involve thousands of policy makers working together over several years to develop consensual visions of principles and possible solutions to some of humankind's most challenging problems. Since the Earth Summit of 1992 and counting the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) of 2003/2005, the UN has hosted almost one Summit per year for 11 years.

World summits are dogged by a fundamental question: what are they good for? Do they produce social and political change commensurate with their enormous cost in money and policy makers' time? True, at least one world summit has yielded a major result: the 1992 Earth Summit produced the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that led to national commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Other summits, however, have not had such clear-cut results. The question remains: is a world summit a vehicle for meaningful social and political change?

In what follows, I propose a conceptual framework for addressing this question, and I apply it to WSIS. From that analysis, I conclude that summits can make a significant contribution to social change. Summits present *opportunities*, making valuable resources available for political advocacy. However, they are just one element needed for change; also needed are candidate policies that fit those opportunities and policy advocates with the influence to realize those opportunities. When all those elements come together, significant results can be achieved. Evidence of summits' power can be seen in the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which challenged the global Internet governance regime.

## Conceptual Framework

In analyzing world summits, I begin by distinguishing between *form* and *content*. The content of any summit refers to the particular issues that were discussed at the summit and the particular results that were achieved there. The content of the 1992 Earth Summit consisted of the environmental issues and principles addressed there, the content of the 1995 Women's Summit likewise included the specific policies for women discussed there, and so on. In contrast, the form of world summits refers to the enduring organizational form employed for all of them, irrespective of their content. All summits employ a broadly similar form for participa-

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tion, collective decision making, and implementation, and this form defines the “rules of the game,”—which in turn define opportunities for certain classes of political actors to achieve certain kinds of political outcomes.

Stated differently, a summit is an *institution*—a recurring social structure that constrains some actions and facilitates others—that presents an *opportunity structure*—a set of predictable causal mechanisms and political resources by which to pursue social and political change. To assess summits’ utility as vehicles for change, I offer this analysis of the opportunity structures they present.

Two features of summits figure most prominently here: their characteristics as a policy forum and the mechanisms available to them for policy implementation. Summits’ characteristics as forums help us understand what kinds of policies can be effectively advocated there. Summits’ repertoires of implementation mechanisms help us understand what kinds of policies, once adopted, can be translated into action. These two features help explain which visions of social change can be most meaningfully endorsed at a summit and then most effectively realized in practice.

Two additional, non-institutional factors also figure in achieving change. The first is the existence of proposals that “fit” the opportunity structure. These are policies that can benefit from the mechanisms and resources a summit makes available. The particular resources presented by a summit are not appropriate for all proposals, and those with good fit may advance the most. The second factor is advocacy. Advocacy provides the motive force to exploit opportunity; without advocacy, opportunities can go wasted.

Thus, a summit is most likely to lead to real change when there exist (1) effective advocates (2) of policies that fit both (3) the characteristics of summits as forums and (4) their associated implementation mechanisms. It is this combination of advocacy, fit, and opportunity that produces change.

I apply this conceptual framework to WSIS in an attempt to explain that summit’s major outcomes. Held in Geneva in 2003, WSIS served to articulate a collective vision about the benefits of information to society. WSIS also produced some potentially important policies. Benefiting from a combination of opportunity, fit, and advocacy, two major policies advanced: one to review the global system for

Internet governance and the other to provide funding for developing countries.

## The World Summit Form

Since 1992 the UN has hosted 10 summits, listed in Table 1.

*Table 1. UN-Hosted Summits*

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1. 1992: Earth Summit (Conference on Environment and Development), Rio de Janeiro
  2. 1993: Human Rights Summit (Conference on Human Rights), Vienna
  3. 1994: Population Summit (International Conference on Population and Development), Cairo
  4. 1995: Social Summit (World Summit for Social Development), Copenhagen
  5. 1995: Women’s Summit (Fourth World Conference on Women), Beijing
  6. 1996: Habitat II (Conference on Human Settlements), Istanbul
  7. 1996: World Food Summit, Rome
  8. 2001: World Summit Against Racism (World Summit Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Other Related Intolerances), Durban
  9. 2002: World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg
  10. 2003/2005: World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Geneva/Tunis
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This list is not presented as definitive. There were summits held before 1992, and indeed, many of the summits on this list built on previous events (e.g., the first Earth Summit of 1972 or the Habitat I summit of 1976.) Furthermore, not all summits are explicitly identified as such. Of the 10 summits listed here, only 4 are explicitly entitled World Summit. [For an expanded list of “UN conferences,” see the report by the Office of the Millennium Assembly (2001).]

Nonetheless, from this series we can discern the outlines of what could be called the world summit form. The form consists of a time line of activities, a pattern of participation, and the summit products. WSIS illustrates most features of this form, although it includes some unique features as well.

Although a world summit lasts only a few days, the preparatory and follow-up processes occur over a period of years. The initial steps toward the 2003

WSIS began in 1998, when the UN's International Telecommunications Union (ITU) proposed it within the UN system. In December 2001 the General Assembly formally authorized the summit, to be held in December 2003 (Phase I) and November 2005 (Phase II).

In any summit the most intense activity occurs in the preparatory phase. In the two years between the authorization of WSIS in 2001 and the actual event in 2003, the ITU conducted two series of meetings: preparatory committee meetings (prepcoms) and regional meetings. Prepcom I followed within 6 months of the General Assembly's 2001 Resolution, and Prepcoms II and III were held at subsequent 6-month intervals. All were held in Geneva. Regional meetings were held over a briefer period, but were distributed in locations around the world. Between Prepcoms I and II the ITU organized regional meetings in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Europe/North America. These many meetings served to gather input from around the world and to prepare the documents that would be adopted in 2003.

The summit itself is a ceremony of ratification in which heads of state make speeches and ratify the collective documents produced over the preceding two years. The first-phase summit in WSIS ran for 3 days in December 2003.

The final procedural step in the summit form is the follow-up conference, the so-called summit-plus-five event. Five years after the event there is a conference to assess the progress made toward implementing the summit plans. An assessment report is written and many of the participants from the original summit reassemble.

Throughout these stages in a summit there is broad and inclusive participation. With the UN grounded in the nation state system, national governments are the main participants. Thousands of government officials participate in all stages, and the actual summit itself normally attracts most of the world's heads of state. Additional participants come from industry and from civil society (or nongovernmental organizations—the terms are used interchangeably here). Industry can play an important role in summits closely connected to industrial issues, such as environment, food, or housing. NGOs often possess great expertise in issue areas and play important roles in policy advocacy. Numerically, NGOs often outnumber other classes of

summit participants. The media is a fourth class of participants. With participation by heads of state, industry leaders, and NGOs, a world summit is a major media event. The 1992 Earth Summit alone attracted over 7000 journalists, and they in turn provided intensive coverage in print, radio, and television (Grubb, 1993). Although WSIS attracted fewer media representatives, it still generated headlines around the world.

In addition to process and participation, the world summit form also defines product. In the abstract, a summit produces understanding and a collective vision. Concretely, most summits produce two documents: a declaration of principles and a plan of action. A declaration of principles articulates the normative framework for policy, often building on the UN Charter and previous statements on rights. It might refer to earlier established rights, affirm their applicability to specific issue areas such as development or women, and even propose expansion into new areas. A plan of action translates principles into more specific actions. It might define high-level policy initiatives, set milestones for implementation, or call for funding of program areas. While certainly not a detailed statement of policy suitable for immediate implementation, these summit documents provide the broad outlines of comprehensive policy on the summit topic. (For purposes of this study, I refer to the high-level principles and actions produced at summits as "policy.")

While each summit embodies this form, each also departs from it in some ways. WSIS adopted two significant innovations. First, WSIS was a double summit, with the first meeting in Geneva in 2003 and the second in Tunis in 2005. This possibly offered opportunities for more prolonged policy making. Second, WSIS formalized the role of civil society to an unprecedented degree, creating an official "civil society bureau" that held formal meetings with the bureaus for governments and the private (business) sector. These two characteristics of WSIS are discussed in greater detail below.

This, then, is the world summit form. Two years of preparatory activity precede the event, the summit itself attracts thousands of participants, including heads of state, two documents are produced, and a follow-up conference occurs later. But does anything change as a result? The next section considers summits as a political institution offering an opportunity for policy change.

### Summit as Forum

The analysis here considers a summit as a means to make and implement policy. In this section, I analyze a summit's means for policy making, and in the next section I analyze its available mechanisms for implementation. Throughout the discussion, I consider issues of policy fit.

A summit is first and foremost a *forum*. A forum is a means for policy making. A precondition for policy making is the existence of an appropriate forum, without which policy makers may be unable to meet to make collective decisions (Klein, 1999). Fundamental characteristics of any forum are its jurisdiction, its participants, and its timing. A world summit embodies a unique set of these characteristics, making it better suited to address some issues than others.

A forum's jurisdiction can be of two types: spatial and topical. The spatial jurisdiction of a world summit extends—as the name says—to the entire world. Participants come from all over the world, they collectively identify issues that are relevant at the global level, and they propose global policies. In light of the small number of global policy forums, this spatial jurisdiction renders a world summit a rare and potentially powerful institution. It provides one prerequisite (among others) for global change: a meeting place in which to discuss global issues and formulate global policy.

Topical jurisdiction refers to a summit's theme. A summit on the topic of environment can meaningfully address environmental issues, and summits on women, housing, or racism can meaningfully address topics on those themes. Topical jurisdiction limits the kinds of policies a summit can produce but also increases its significance in its topic area.

Recognition of these jurisdictional characteristics allows us to identify issues that are a good fit for world summits. Issues that fit well are (1) in the topical area and (2) global in scope. Some issues that are typically global include functional systems (e.g., global climate, global environment, global economy); human rights (which apply to all humans on the globe); and global equity (which presupposes a global community within which some people suffer an injustice). For example, the issue of climate change was a good fit for the 1992 Earth Summit: climate fit the topic and it is a global system.

A second characteristic of a forum is participation. Compared with other global forums, world summits are unusually open, both in the number and the diversity of participants. As described earlier, participants number in the thousands, and government, industry, and civil society all have access to the policy process. Wealthy countries and developing countries participate with formally equal status. At WSIS the rules for participation broke new ground by granting civil society formal standing comparable to that of governments and industry. Such open access is more significant for less influential players, since there are few forums in which they can participate. Thus, summits present comparatively better opportunities for one class of political actors: politically weaker groups.

Summits are often a place where rights of oppressed groups can be advanced. Proposals to acknowledge rights of women, children, oppressed minorities, and the poor are a good fit. Likewise, proposals to transfer wealth from rich countries to poor may stand a better chance of being advanced at a summit than at other global forums (e.g., a G8 meeting of the world's wealthiest nations). Given that summits are primarily intergovernmental meetings, weaker nations benefit the most. Civil society also benefits by being given the opportunity to try to persuade policy makers.

Related to this are the rules for decision making. Summit decisions are made by nations on a one-country, one-vote basis. Thus, not only does a summit create an opportunity for global policy making, it employs an egalitarian procedure for deciding on those policies. Such rules favor weaker (and more numerous) nations.

A final characteristic of a summit as a forum is its timing. Unlike most policy-making forums that endure over time (e.g., a national legislature), a summit is a one-time event. It is active for about two years, and the main event lasts a few days. A window of opportunity opens briefly in time and then closes.

The innovation in WSIS broke potentially significant new ground in this characteristic. WSIS's two-phase approach will keep the forum open for a much longer period of time, potentially allowing for an iterative process of policy making and for more enduring political oversight of initial implementations. (At the time of this writing the second phase

is beginning, so the consequences of this temporal extension have not yet played out).

Some policies fit this temporal characteristic. Policies that have lain dormant or that have been deadlocked for years may be resuscitated for a world summit. The summit may serve as a new forum in which to re-fight old battles. Or the timing of a world summit itself might be manipulated by the UN itself. Since it controls the timing of the events, the UN can launch a world summit when it wants. This can be particularly useful when the UN is challenging a rival institution, such as a neo-liberal institution outside the UN system. As discussed below, the timing of WSIS conferred advantage to the UN's ITU in its challenge to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) for authority over Internet identifiers. In general, issues in which the UN has an interest may be a good fit for a summit.

This temporal characteristic can also render a summit unpredictable. An issue in good political currency just at the time of the summit could receive disproportionate benefit, whereas issues temporarily in disfavor could miss the opportunity. An element of chance may affect whether policies fit or not.

In summary, institutional analysis reveals four features of summits' opportunity structure. Summits' global jurisdiction, topical jurisdiction, rules of participation, and timing all conditions which policies fit the institution. Topical policies with a global dimension are a good fit for a world summit. Policies that favor players with little political influence are also a good fit (at least compared with other global forums). Policies in good currency at the time of a summit can benefit from the opportunity presented by a summit.

## Implementation Mechanisms

So far the discussion has focused on words rather than deeds. As forums, world summits produce statements of principle and plans of action and, for the most part, they stop at that. Implementation happens later, if at all. In this section, I examine available mechanisms for translating summit plans into programs of action.

Review of previous world summits reveals both formal and informal implementation mechanisms. Most formal implementation mechanisms are UN or governmental organizations. Informal implementa-

tion mechanisms are political resources created by world summits that influence other policy processes. I consider each in turn.

Formal implementation mechanisms used by past summits include UN agencies, multilateral conventions, national governments, and funding programs. Of these four, UN agencies provide the closest parallel to conventional policy implementation, in which a national legislature makes policy and a national agency implements it.

UN agencies have frequently implemented summit policies. For instance, following Habitat II held in Istanbul in 1996, the UN Centre on Human Settlements (UNHCS) launched a number of informational programs on housing. UNHCS actively collected and disseminated publications on best practices in housing and developed statistical and qualitative indicators to allow countries to assess their housing resources. A UNHCS website, [www.BestPractices.org](http://www.BestPractices.org), made this information publicly available at no charge. Another example of UN implementation was the creation of the Commission on Human Rights. The Commission provided a standing capability to pursue the policies endorsed at the 1993 Vienna Human Rights Summit.

Since the UN rarely has immediate jurisdiction over people or programs, the most effective mechanism for policy implementation is often national governments. This can take a variety of forms. At the highest level is a multilateral convention, in which national governments agree to a collective program of policy implementation. The Earth Summit provided the best known example of a multilateral convention: the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Although a nonbinding agreement, that convention set basic parameters to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. More importantly, it led to the Kyoto Protocol, which contained more formal mechanisms for enforcement. Rarely has a summit achieved such concrete implementation (and even the Kyoto Protocol faltered after the United States withdrew its support).

National government implementation can also be realized by individual governments without a formal multilateral convention. Following the 1992 Earth Summit as many as 150 countries created national-level commissions or coordinating mechanisms for sustainable development. The 1994 Population Summit in Cairo led to country-level implementations, as

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numerous countries repealed national laws that encoded discrimination and unequal treatment toward women (Cohen, 1999). Policy statements at the global level were implemented in law by multiple national governments.

Finally, summit policies may, at least in theory, be implemented through funding programs. The UN can create and administer a fund. Nearly every summit has featured a debate between rich and poor countries about the need for financial support to realize summit goals. However, most summits have ended with dashed expectations. For example, at the 1995 Social Summit in Copenhagen numerous countries called for debt relief as a means to promote development, but such policies were neither adopted nor implemented.

It must be noted that, in general, world summits lack a strong track record of implementation. This is hardly surprising. First, it is almost always easier to promulgate policy than implement it; UN summit policies are not unique in this regard. Second, summits have addressed some of the most enduring and intractable problems of humanity (food, shelter, development). No one can expect a summit to easily achieve significant social change in such areas. Third, and perhaps most important, summits' Declarations of Principle and Plans of Action attempt to be all-encompassing, and so, are very general. Indeed, summits describe their product as "vision," not "policy." Their contribution is as much to define what the issues are as to propose solutions. A vision does not lend itself to concrete implementation and may be a precursor to further political debate.

Even without formal implementation, however, policy ideas may be translated into action. Much of a summit's impact may occur through *informal* mechanisms. Here the ideas developed in a summit achieve social change indirectly. Two such informal implementation mechanisms are discourse and legitimation.

Summits shape policy discourse. Summits define terms of debate in their issue areas, identifying problems and setting priorities that filter down to other policy arenas. Regardless of whether such ideas are supported or opposed, their codification in UN statements makes them more real. Existence of the terms can be a necessary prerequisite for achieving action.

Although this may sound abstract to the reader, the act of shaping discourse can have concrete ef-

fects. For example, the 2001 World Conference Against Racism led to few identifiable policy implementations. However, it greatly raised the profile of debates over reparations for slavery. Extensive media coverage of this issue brought it to the attention of people and policy makers around the world, creating an environment where policies could be discussed. Another example was the 1995 Women's Summit in Beijing, which helped differentiate and condemn concepts like "honor crimes" and "conflict rape." By defining and diffusing a discourse about such crimes, it becomes possible for policy makers in other arenas to talk about them. Absent such a discourse, they might not ever be discussed.

The media play an important role in diffusing discourse. Most summits attract considerable media attention, creating an opportunity to diffuse ideas to a global audience. Issues debated at a summit can spark further debate and policy action in other forums.

The second informal implementation mechanism is legitimation. Legitimation takes policy concepts one step further: not only are the concepts known, they are also validated. A UN summit carries great prestige, so the issues and ideas that it endorses are imbued with that prestige. Legitimated ideas are then more easily advocated and implemented in other policy arenas.

Legitimate policy derives from legitimate institutions, and summits' lengthy preparatory processes, open participation, and high-level political support give them considerable legitimacy. With so much input from so many groups, products of a summit are a strong statement of world consensus. That legitimacy is enhanced by the participation of heads of state, who bestow supreme political authority on the final products.

Policies that fit this institutional characteristic are those that need great legitimacy. An example of such a policy is the declaration of a right. As a political absolute, a right needs a solid foundation in legitimacy. Summits have repeatedly proven their value as forums for the affirmation of rights, such as the 1993 Human Rights Summit, which reaffirmed and strengthened the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Subsequent summits have declared such rights as fertility rights (Population Summit), housing rights (Habitat II), and the rights of women (Women's Summit). Not all issues are suc-



successful in gaining legitimacy, however. For example, at the 1996 World Food Summit U.S. biotechnology firms were criticized for seeking endorsement of genetically engineered agricultural products. The genetically modified products would have benefited from the legitimization afforded by a summit, but they were unable to obtain it.

Endowed with legitimacy, world summits may challenge powerful but less legitimate institutions. Even if another institution possesses funds, staff, and expertise, if it lacks legitimacy, then its policies might be susceptible to challenge. Thus, summits frequently criticize the global distribution of wealth and they call for transfers from north to south. Or they may raise questions about policies emanating from neo-liberal institutions that are justified by their alleged efficiency.

Sometimes formal and informal policies work hand in hand. The practice of “naming and shaming” may achieve policy implementation through such indirect means. The definition of indicators (a formal implementation mechanism) allows observers to measure individual countries’ standing in a policy area (e.g., housing). Then the legitimization of values (an informal mechanism) allows judgments to be attached to the measures (e.g., data on housing might be used to claim that citizens’ “right to housing” is being violated). Countries found lagging in valued social characteristics can be subject to public criticism in an attempt to embarrass policy elites into taking remedial action.

In summary, world summits can draw on a repertoire of policy implementation mechanisms. Formal mechanisms include UN administrative agencies, multilateral agreements, national governments, and funding mechanisms. Informal mechanisms include the shaping of discourse and legitimization. Proposed policies that fit these characteristics may be good candidates for achieving social and political change. Thus, world summits present an attractive opportunity to advance policies that can be implemented by a UN agency. Summits also present an opportunity to advance policies that need a solid foundation in legitimacy (e.g., rights) or that challenge powerful institutions. Finally, for advocates of conceptual innovations, summits provide a chance to diffuse new concepts in policy discourse. Concepts endorsed at a world summit may gain acceptance in policy debates in other arenas.

## Understanding WSIS

The preceding institutional analysis can be applied to the outcomes of the 2003 Geneva phase of WSIS. Although I will refer to them as “WSIS outcomes,” the reader should bear in mind the summit is ongoing at the time of this writing. WSIS did generate policy change consistent with the preceding conceptual analysis—even though concrete social and political change remains in the future.

WSIS produced three classes of outcomes: significant policy action, significant policy inaction, and (a large set of) ambiguous outcomes. There were two significant policy actions, each embodied in an ad hoc working group: the Working Group on Internet Governance and the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms. There was one significant policy inaction: information security. Despite the fact that terrorism—including cyber-terrorism—was the most visible policy issue during the preparatory phase (viz., the 2001 terror attacks in the United States), WSIS made no notable contribution in this area. Finally, there were countless ambiguous cases. From these, I discuss two: communication rights and free and open-source software.

In Table 2, I analyze these outcomes against the conceptual framework outlined above. The policies that resulted from WSIS exhibited a good fit with the opportunity structure. This suggests that the world summit’s provision of valuable political resources helped make these outcomes possible.

### *Internet Governance*

The single most important outcome of WSIS was a challenge to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) (Schenker, 2003). Created in 1998 as a private, U.S.-based corporation under the sole political authority of the United States, ICANN constitutes a nascent global governance regime for the Internet (Klein, 2002a). It is unpopular because of its perceived violation of sovereignty through its control of the Internet’s globally-shared core resources. China, South Africa, Brazil, and most Arab states, in an implicit alliance with the ITU, successfully initiated a process to review and possibly change the ICANN regime (Peake, 2004). The WSIS Plan of Action included a recommendation that the UN Secretary General set up a working group to “investigate and make proposals for action, as appropriate, on the governance of [the] Internet.”

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Table 2. Analysis of WSIS Policies

Policy	Forum Characteristics				Implementation Mechanisms					
	Spatial Jurisdiction	Topical Jurisdiction	Legitimacy	Timing	UN Agency	Multilateral Agreement	National Government	Funding	Discourse	Legitimacy
I. Significant outcomes										
1. Internet governance	●	●	●	●	●	●				
2. Digital solidarity fund	●	○		○				●		
II. Significant non-outcomes										
3. Security	●	●		●		●				
III. Ambiguous outcomes										
4. Free and open-source software	○	●	●	●			○			●
5. Communication rights	●	●	●	○					●	●

Note: ● Excellent fit ○ Some fit [blank] No fit

The advocates of this outcome benefited from the opportunity presented by WSIS. Nearly all the resources offered by the World Summit proved relevant:

- Jurisdiction: as a policy proposal for a global system (the Internet), the proposal to review Internet governance fits both WSIS's global and topical jurisdiction. WSIS provided an appropriate venue for the challenge to ICANN.
- Participation: the governance initiative came from countries that normally would not play a leading role in Internet policy. However, the Summit's rules for inclusive participation and equitable voting favored the challenging nations against wealthier countries.
- Timing: the ITU was able to influence the timing of WSIS, initiating it just when ICANN was being formed in 1998. ICANN was still new and vulnerable, so the timing supported the challenge.
- Implementing agency: although skeptics of the ITU were many, the agency was nonetheless qualified to implement policy in this area. Thus an appropriate mechanism existed, increasing the likelihood that any policies adopted could be implemented.

- Multilateral agreement: if needed, Internet governance could be implemented as a multilateral convention. (At the time of this writing, it is too early to know if this mechanism will be used.)
- Legitimacy: this was a particularly valuable resource. ICANN suffered from a striking legitimacy deficit (Klein, 2002b, 2004). In contrast, the challenge emanating from WSIS could claim to express world consensus.

In summary, advocates of the review of Internet governance benefited from the political resources made available at WSIS. Without the political resources made available by WSIS, their challenge might have been impossible.

### Digital Solidarity Fund

A second potentially significant outcome of WSIS was the creation of a task force to consider a "digital solidarity fund." This would be a mechanism to address issues commonly known as the "digital divide" by transferring wealth from rich countries to poor. The same coalition mentioned above—the so-called Cancun coalition (because they had blocked an earlier round of WTO negotiations in Cancun)—supported this proposal, although African countries



played a leading role as well (Accuosto and Johnson, 2004).

WSIS provided an opportunity, and advocates seized that opportunity. The summit resources most relevant here were:

- **Jurisdiction:** since the forum brought together rich and poor countries, it created an opportunity for global financial assistance. The summit topic was well suited to justify a discussion of the digital divide in information technology. Thus, a proposed global policy to address the digital divide was a good fit for WSIS.
- **Participation:** poor countries could promote policies that addressed their needs.
- **Timing:** the collapse of the ITU-based accounting rate and settlement system in 1997 eliminated an important mechanism for wealth transfer from rich to poor countries. WSIS provided an opportunity for this dormant issue to be reconsidered.
- **Funding:** this issue is a good candidate for a formal fund. Certainly mechanisms exist for implementation.

Proposals for wealth transfers are not uncommon at summits, but they often fail to win the support of the intended donor countries and so are not implemented. Although important, this outcome was probably not as significant as the Internet governance outcome.

### **Security**

The lack of a security proposal at WSIS seems to present a puzzle. Computer viruses, denial of service attacks, and other destructive acts on and against computer networks are a widely recognized problem (Goodman, Hassebroek, & Klein, 2003). Furthermore, unlike the previous two outcomes just mentioned, the United States was a strong advocate of greater information security. This policy area seems a perfect fit for WSIS:

- **Jurisdiction:** like Internet governance, global information security fits WSIS's spatial and topical jurisdiction. The Summit made available an appropriate forum for making such policy.
- **Timing:** global concern for security is at an unprecedented high. The coincidence of an issue in good currency and an appropriate forum

presented an opportunity for a major policy initiative.

- **Multilateral agreement:** there is an appropriate and available implementation mechanism.

However, WSIS did not produce significant outcomes here. The reason is probably that the opportunity presented by the Summit did not match the needs of this policy's main advocate, the United States. Just months before WSIS, the United States was encouraging Japan to support information security initiatives in such forums as the G8 and the OECD, restricted "clubs" of more powerful nations. A proposed policy on information security didn't need the more open participation available at WSIS. As a result, no major security outcomes were achieved.

### **Free and Open-Source Software (FOSS)**

FOSS includes systems such as Linux and office software suites. FOSS is increasingly seen as an alternative to proprietary software sold by U.S. companies such as Microsoft. FOSS advocates at WSIS included civil society groups, major industrial firms (e.g., IBM), and many countries (but not the United States). Did FOSS advance at WSIS? The nature of FOSS makes that difficult to assess.

- **Jurisdiction:** FOSS fits WSIS's topical but not its spatial jurisdiction. FOSS is not a global system; rather, it is a global movement or market. Nonetheless, a global forum such as WSIS was useful to reach the assembled policy community.
- **Legitimacy:** this was important, as FOSS has a great need for legitimacy. However, the legitimacy it needs is of a technical and market nature; ultimately the future of FOSS will be decided by users in the marketplace. Nonetheless, political endorsement of FOSS could help it win acceptance by governments and users around the world.
- **Timing:** the timing was good. WSIS occurred when interest in FOSS was attracting increased interest around the world.
- **National government implementation:** FOSS could benefit from formal implementation mechanisms.

The diffusion and adoption of FOSS probably benefited from WSIS. Around the time of WSIS, Brazil began to consider switching officially to a

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FOSS standard, and the city of Munich officially adopted the Linux operating system just a few months after WSIS (AP, 2003, 2004). Whether they were influenced by FOSS's greater legitimacy following WSIS is unknown.

### **Communication Rights**

If the reader is familiar with the term communication rights, then advocates of this set of concepts will have succeeded in shaping the policy discourse. Communication rights are composed of a set of positive rights that go beyond the right to free speech. They include a right of access to media and education in order to communicate to others and to the broader society. Some of the Summit's resources were relevant to advocates of these rights:

- **Jurisdiction:** as rights, these were appropriately treated in a global forum. Topically, they were a good fit for WSIS.
- **Legitimacy:** this was important. WSIS presented an opportunity to legitimize this concept and bring it into the mainstream.
- **Timing:** this proposal was of long standing, tracing its roots back to the UNESCO debates of the 1980s. WSIS presented an opportunity to re-animate this issue.
- **Discourse and Legitimacy:** WSIS was an opportunity to put this issue back on the communications policy agenda. Were the term to gain wider usage, the concept of communication rights might be more discussed and, ultimately perhaps, adopted.

Communication rights were a good fit for WSIS and were actively advocated. However, they encountered opposition from groups in the WSIS process, and were not explicitly included. The fact that there was a debate over communication rights at WSIS did serve, however, to disseminate this discourse.

### **Conclusion**

Assessing outcomes in this way is not an exact science. But the conceptual framework above provides a general idea of what worked at WSIS and why. The Internet governance initiative may not have been attributable exclusively to WSIS, but it would have been difficult for developing countries to challenge ICANN without the legitimacy of the Summit.

That policy was nearly a perfect fit to the opportunity structure of a summit.

The conceptual framework presented here may be more useful for forward-thinking strategy formation than for backward-thinking historical explanation. When policy advocates successfully recognize the opportunity structure of a summit, they can select issues that best fit that structure and prioritize the resources they will pursue. And although good strategy cannot guarantee success, it can reduce errors and contribute to success.

This analysis suggests that the two-part nature of WSIS is an important change in the summit form. With the extension of the summit in time, the forum's resources may be utilized for a longer time. Since summits proportionately benefit some classes of actors (weak parties) over others (influential parties), the extension of the summit could facilitate more egalitarian global policy making.

Do summits make a difference? They can. They present an opportunity structure that, when combined with advocacy and well-fitting policy proposals, can lead to change. At minimum, summits offer an opportunity to define discourse, and it is in that realm of words that they have perhaps their greatest effect, consistent with the characterization of their products as "vision." Sometimes their effects are more concrete. Changing the governance of a global system—be it technical or environmental—is a major change, but one for which anything less than a world summit could fall short. ■

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