Participation of developing countries in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process: Ecuador case study[1]

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CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Ecuador is a country with profound social, political and economic inequality and inequity. It has not generated the conditions needed to face the vertiginous and unequal race between countries to integrate into the so-called information society.

The country approached the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) amidst great political instability, which intensified in 1996 and has lasted to date; in a context of relative macroeconomic recuperation due to the dollarised system; but with an alarming statistical growth of emigrant population because of increased unemployment. This advance, seemingly, took place with no consciousness of the geopolitical circumstances or their implications for the democratisation of communication and ICT. Probably also with no consciousness of the agendas behind the agenda of a global discussion process promoted by the UN as an effort directed towards designing a framework for the development of the information society. On the other hand, there was insufficient analysis of the impact of national participation in the attainment of development objectives. In some measure, the governmental actors were infected with the euphoria of the expansion of the telecommunications infrastructure and connectivity as the panacea for poverty and low-level economic development as they approached the process. Furthermore, they did so under the illusion that the country is already undergoing a social, political, economic, and cultural phenomenon known as the information society.

This case study has the intent of reviewing national participation in the WSIS process based on three aspects: the perspective of various actors, the description and analysis of the public planning structure relating to ICT and the critical reconstruction of the quality of the country's participation in the internal and external dynamics of the Summit.

The current report is part of the research project 'World Summit on the Information Society phase 2: Assessing the engagement of civil society and developing countries' developed by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC).

General socio-economic facts

Ecuador has an approximate population of 13,520,430 inhabitants (39% in rural areas)[2]. The official language is Spanish. Quichua, Shuar and other indigenous languages are officially used by indigenous peoples. Quito, the capital, is the headquarters of the three branches of the state, executive, judicial and legislative.

The country's average schooling, according to the population and housing census in 2001, is 7.1[3]. The Human Development Index of the country is .759[4]. In September 2005, through an executive decree, the fulfilment of the Milennium Development

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2   VI Population Census and V Household Census. Ecuadorian Institute for Statistics and Census (INEC). http://www.inec.gov.ec/interna.asp?inc=cs_resultados&idCenso=7

3   Average schooling refers to the average number of years of school atended by population of 10 years of age and older, at different levels of instruction, within the country's formal education system: 8 years of primary education, 6 of secondary and at least 4 higher level.

4   Ecuador occupies the 82nd place in the HDI classification, with which it is among the groups with medium human development.

Goals (MDG) was determined to be public policy. This was done with the intention of formulating a national human development strategy. However, in it information communication technology (ICT) is not mentioned as a tool to facilitate its attainment.

In January 2006, the following economic data was registered[5]: Economically active population: 4,400,00 people between 10 and 50 years of age; unemployment rate: 10%; underemployment rate: 52%; formal employment rate: 38%; gross domestic product (GDP): 30 billion dollars; projected annual economic growth until 2006: 2.5 to 3%; external public debt: 12 millon dollars. The current inflation, from February 2005 to February 2006, was 5.31%. The debt maintenance payments in Ecuador exceed the expenditures made for public education and ICT.

Main regional and international alliances

The main international organisations of which the country is a member include: United Nations (UN), Organisation of American States (OAS), Andean Community of Nations (CAN), Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA), Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), and World Trade Organisation (WTO). The country participates in the commercial agreement CAN-Mercosur (Common Southern Market), in over 30 bilateral commercial agreements, is a member of the Asia-Pacific business committee and is negotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States, which is expected to conclude at the end of March 2006.

Regarding ICT, the country participates in the following international organisations: International Telecommunications Union, (ITU), Interamerican Telecommunications Commission (CITEL), Andean Committee of Telecommunication Authorities (CAATEL), and the Latin American Forum of Telecommunication Regulatory Entities (REGULATEL). Within the framework of CAN, the Ecuadorian government has collaborated with the formulation of the Andean strategy on the information and knowledge society.

Ecuador, along with other governments in the region, participated in the following consensus processes on the importance and convenience of the use of ICT: the Florianópolis Declaration (July 2000), the Itacuru Declaration (October 2000), the Rio Group Proposal for the Integration of Latin America into the Information Society (March 2001), the Rio de Janeiro Declaration on ICT for Development (June 2001), the Connectivity Agenda for the Americas and the Quito Plan of Action (August 2002), the First Meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Network and the United Nations ICT Task Force LACNET (February 2002), the Bávaro Declaration (January 2003), among others.

National ICT policymaking structure, legal and regulatory framework and national ICT situation

The trajectory of the country in terms of ICT policy reveals a planning and public management culture that follows a hierarchical, centralised and vertical logic. The

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[5]   Statistic data provided by the Central Bank of Ecuador (BCE) http://www.bce.fin.ec and by the Nacional Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) http://www.inec.gov.ec

design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policy take place without the formal or informal participation of all the stakeholders – particularly local governments and organised civil society – who have not representation at the decision-making level and the possibility to participate in designating sector-related authorities.

 This implies, on one hand, that public policy options and measures favour specific groups of economic and political power in the area of telecommunications. On the other hand, only those who have the ability to pay for telecommunications services, both those provided by state-run businesses[6] as well as private ones, will enjoy their benefits.

2002 marked the beginning of the liberalisation of the telecommunications market in Ecuador. Therefore its services, including the carriers and their benefits, operate in an open market. In August 2001, the National connectivity commission was created with the mandate of proposing a National connectivity agenda. This would consist of a public policy that would guide the development of the information society and the dissemination of ICT in five areas: e-education, e-
government, infrastructure, e-commerce and e-health. From that moment, the driving area was infrastructure; the remaining ones have received minimal coverage.

No State institutions that serve the exclusive purpose of formulating and implementing public ICT policies exist beyond the National connectivity commission[7]. They are assumed (for both the design as well as the execution) by the organizations that manage telecommunications. The institutional policymaking structure is carried out at three institutional levels, with jurisdiction in all the national territory:

- National Telecommunications Council (CONATEL), which determines public policy and regulatory norms. It must regulate the market and stimulate competition.
- National Telecommunications Secretariat (SENATEL), which executes the policies established by CONATEL.
- Telecommunications Superintendency, which controls and supervises public and private telecommunications agents.

An organisation of particular relevance for ICT policies in Ecuador is the Fund for the development of telecommunications in rural and marginal urban areas (FODETEL), created in August 2001, and subordinate to CONATEL. Nevertheless, it was only at the beginning of 2004 that it truly assumed its role. This organisation compensates for the deficiencies in the provision of ICT services in non-proifitable areas, providing subsidies and economic incentives to telecommunications business, so they will invest in these areas. Its main purpose is to implement the Universal Service Plan (PSU), with two specific mechanisms: The expansion of telecommunications service and carrying out social initiatives and projects in areas within the Fund's jurisdiction. The Fund is primarily financed by contributions from the telecommunication

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6   The Ecuadorian State operates fixed telephony services through two public businesses whose capital belongs to the Solidarity Fund. Said businesses operate like public limited companies and therefore offer services based on market regulations.
7   "...The National Connectivity Commision acts as an entity that proposes public policy options or measures, although it lacks the real power and authority to decide on their adoption or carry out their implementation".
    Jurado Vargas, Romel. Diagnóstico de políticas de TIC en Ecuador, FLACSO, UNESCO, IICD, GDS e Infodesarrollo.ec., enero 2006.

operating services and public networks, franchise owners, operating permits and donations from national and international organisations. It does have, however, serious difficulties collecting these contributions.

The legal and regulatory framework for ICT is relatively extensive in Ecuador, and it ultimately affects the conditions in which they are accesed and goods and services are consumed.

Not unlike other countries in Latin America, the right to access ICT is not recognized. Therefore, the creation of public policies basically respond to the ability of certain actors (generally business-related, that seek to gain a competitive edge and find a place in the global market) to influence at the government level and place their issues, especially the one about the expansion of telecommunication infrastructure, in the public agenda. It is only in the last years, that public actors have adopted a more holistic vision about ICT and their role in favour of human development. This has led ministries, like that of Agricuture and of Health, and local governments to design their own strategies with a development focus. However, it is important to note that these fail to respond to a central policy.

There is nevertheless a particular precedent, that the right to communicate is constitutionally recognized. This could consequently provide adequate judicial support for the development of an ICT legal and regulatory framework that will set conditions for their democratization, with a focus on public goods. For the time being, regulation is configured by the "conception that judicial relations that take place between people and between these and the State, are fundamentally originated from commercial and technological happenings, given which laws are established to regulate the conditions for the provision of services and the rights of the consumers of said services, within a framework of free competition"[8].

The penetration of ICT services has increased significantly in the last decade. Ecuador has the second highest index of penetration for mobile telephony in Latin America. Mobile telephony grew 9,970.39% from December 1996 to December 2005. The services market, especially those offered through mobily telephony (such as the access to e-mail, television, text and voice messaging, etc.) has experienced noticeable growth over a short period of time. However, the vast majou.rity of the population only uses voice transmission services due to the cost of equipment that supports other applications. According to SUPTEL, in November 2006 there were 8,190,923 mobile phone users among the 13,520,430 inhabitants of the country. Access to the internet grew 12,548.13% between December 1998 and December 2005. According to CONATEL, 10.13% of the population is connected to the internet. 80% of those connected are concentrated in the two major cities, Quito and Guayaquil.

The country is not well-equipped with networks (copper or fibre optic). In 2006, a 128/64 kbps DSL (broadband) connection cost USD 95 and a cable modem connection cost USD 75, according to CONATEL. The cost per kbps is USD 0.508. Many areas are neglected and some lines are duplicated. The line out to the backbone of the Americas through Miami is inefficient and expensive, and the costs of dial-up via both local landline and mobile telephones are high (USD 0.028 and

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8   Jurado Vargas, Romel. Op. Cit.

0.50 respectively). The cost per minute for a local call in a public phone booth is USD 0.10.

Some causes of the high prices of connection costs in Ecuador, can be summarised as follows[9]:

- Ecuador does not have a large direct exit to reach the submarine cables, which forces it to play a toll for the international connection.
- There is no local information exchange network
- There is low internet penetration in the country
- The implementation costs for new and equipped networks are high
- There is a lack of training on the use of new technologies

The domain registration of the country code (.ec) is run by a private business.

According to the UN E-government readiness index[10], Ecuador has made great progress regarding the online presence of the public sector. From 2003-2004 it rose from position 101 to 87. This advance is fundamentally linked to the availability of public information on line and the provision of online services but not on a substantial increase of citizen participation online and the interaction with public employees. The situation is somewhat different at the level of local governments, as their electronic government initatives are considered, to a certain degree, elements of deepening and broadening democracy with the help of ICT.

The facts show that majourity of the Ecuadorian population is at a disadvantage regarding access to information, knowledge and ICT and its use to improve their living and working conditions.

2. METHODOLOGY

The current case study is based on the following methodological tools:

Primary sources

- Personal interviews with government officials that presided and made up the Ecuadorian delegations at WSIS activities as negotiatiors, in both preparatory meetings as well as the Summit itself.
- E-mail questionnaires for governmental officials that participated in the national WSIS preparation process.
- Personal interviews to members of civil society organisations that constituted the official delegation of Ecuador for the Summit in Tunis and/or that were involved in the national dynamic.
- E-mail questionnaires to civil society and academia members and academias that participated in national dynamics prior to the Summit.
- Interviews with international and regional organisation representatives that

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[9] Conclusions from the forum 'Quality and costs of internet services in Ecuador: Why does Ecuador pay the most expensive internet connexion rate in the world?', held in February 2005 with the support of Red Infodesarrollo.ec, Redes Libres, Machángara Soft, FLACSO y UNESCO.
http://www.infodesarrollo.ec/content/view/169/212/lang.es/
[10] The United Nations internet index is made up of the United Nations global preparation index for electronic government and is based on a specific model for the online presence of government.

participated in regional and global activities at WSIS.
- An interview with a local governmental official.

Secondary sources

- The review of documental information: Different types of documentation were sought and analysed, which include official speeches, internal public institution reports elaborated by the public officials that participated in the Summit's activities, articles written by people from civil society and academia, national position documents vis-à-vis WSIS and information found on the webpages of the national institutions involved.

- The review of information published in national media: interviews with civil servants, members of civil society and articles on the subject of WSIS.

The purpose of the interviews and questionnaires was to collect opinions, experiences, and points of view of the different actors that could provide input from different perspectives and roles. A set of questions was elaborated for governmental officials and members of civil society, the private sector and international organisations. The same set of questions was used with all the public officials and the same procedure was followed with the members of civil society organisations, the private sector and international organisations. Some questions were common to all actors. Eleven people were interviewed and/or given the questionnaire: 5 governmental officials, 1 local/municipal government official, 1 private sector representative (that was also a regional organisation representative), 1 representative from an international organization and 3 members of civil society organisations.

Despite the efforts to dig up official documents related to the first phase of WSIS, counting solely on information related to the final months of the process was not possible because public institutions do not have files that maintain the documents despite changes of the officials in related positions. The documents compiled did not offer input for a timeline of events and happenings.

The information compiled has been qualitatively cross-referenced and compared – both primary and secondary sources- and has been used in this case study for a descriptive and analytical purpose. This document does not intend to reflect a national consensus position on behalf of national actors as a whole regarding the participation in WSIS, rather its purpose is provide information on the situation, the visions and the tendencies from the perspective of an important group of actors in the process.

3. NATIONAL POLICYMAKING PROCESS RELATING TO WSIS

Ecuador does not have a remarkable history of diplomatic management in international discussion and negotiation spheres. This, in addition to its rigid public planning structure, affected national participation in WSIS.

First phase

At the beginning of 2003, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ecuador[11] commissioned CONATEL (specifically ANC) to prepare the country's participation in WSIS. This was based on said institution's legal mandate to address ICT and information society issues. In February of that year, the ANC initiated a process of calling for private business representatives, other governmental entities, academia and civil society organisations (CSOs) so that they would participate in awareness raising and socializing meetings pertainng to the Summit and the purpose of national participation.

As background, towards the end of 2002 civil society organisations held meetings to reflect and debate about national needs, interests and visions on the development of information and knowledge societies seizing the WSIS juncture as an opportunity for dialogue among actors[12].

During 2003, the government carried out a series of workshops in the most important provinces of the country with the intention of seeking input for the elaboration of a national position document for WSIS. It was supposed to make steps toward building multisectoral-working mechanisms around the information society and to establish alignments to guide negotiations in international meetings.

These initiatives opened new possibilities to tighten the government-civil society relationship, which, in one way or another were maintained throught the Summit process, although not always with effective, specific and efficient results. The process faced multiple difficulties, especially due to the following factors: constant changes in the governmental team in charge of the issue; designation of public officials via appointments that lacked the experience to lead national activities and represent the country in the negotiation; scarce if any diplomatic experience; different levels of knowledge on the issues; and finally, the irregular allocation of financial resources to support the participation of the governmental team at regional and global meetings.

It was an uneven, staggered process with random and poorly timed calls for participation that lacked clear coordinating roles and attempted to introduce participatory multisectoral working methodologies. Despite the efforts and the political will of the stakeholders, it did not allow the basic consensus needed for the formulation of a position and priorities of the country to be reached[13].

National participation became more sustained and orderly at the end of the first phase. Nevertheless, at that moment the interest of the various actors from academia, CSOs and other governmental bodies had seriously declined. Members of organisations with a specific action agenda for the Summit preferred to focus their efforts at the regional and global levels[14]. The private sector's participation, with few

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[11] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the entity in charge of coordinating national participation in regional and global summits.

[12] This process is mentioned in the report "Building the human right to communication, a contribution to WSIS' elaborated by Diana Andrade as part of the Ecuanex-Intercom team
http://lac.derechos.apc.org/wsis/cdocs.shtml?x=9874

[13] A more detailed description on the participation of Ecuador in the first phase of WSIS can be found in the article 'The national process surrounding the World Summit on the Information Society in Ecuador. The battle for effective and real multisectoral strategies', the Association for Progressive Communications, April 2004..
http://www.apc.org/apps/img_upload/5ba65079e0c45cd29dfdb3e618dda731/cmsi_proceso_ecuador.pdf

[14] This happened with many of the global and regional communication networks that are headquartered or have working groups in Quito, such as OCLACC, ALER, ALAI, and APC.

exceptions, was null.

Second phase

Ecuador's participation in the Tunis phase can be divided in two moments: Before and after January 2005. National activities were completely suspended between December 2003 and January 2005. Nevertheless, some of the civil society actors remained active in the regional and global dynamic (such as those belonging to caucuses, the bureau, the civil society plenary and specific working groups).

On different occasions, various actors demanded the reactivation of the national process. However there requests often fell on deaf ears. Finally, in January 2005, faced with the imminent PrepCom and the regional preparatory conference, the government reopened the call for input.

Exchanges between civil society and the government were re-established in order to provide input on the issues of internet governance and financing mechanisms for ICT for development. These same discussions were taking place at a global level in special groups or task forces. Therefore, working groups were constituted to develop national positions on the metioned issues. The groups consisted almost entirely of officials of CONATEL-SENATEL. Civil society organisations and private businesses had limited participation. Academia continued to be absent. The input of the working groups directed the participation of the Ecuadorian delegation in Prepcom2.

The internal government coordination (CONATEL- Directorship for multilateral policy and international organisations of the Ministry of Foreign Relations) became visible after the second trimester of 2005. This is specifically due to the preparations for the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Technical Preparatory Meeting for WSIS and the X Consultative Meeting for the INFOLAC[15] programme, held in Quito – Ecuador in April 2005. This meeting was convened by the government of Ecuador, the UN Economic Comission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and UNESCO as preparation for the Rio de Janeiro[16] regional preparatory conference. The CONATEL representatives and the UNESCO team were crucial in ensuring the inclusion of regional civil society actors in the meeting in Quito. The governmental team elaborated its input for the regional information society plan of action, eLAC2007, that were later used at the Quito regional meeting and the regional preparatory conference of Rio de Janeiro, where it was approved by the governments, along with the Rio Declaration[17].

The government also began its participation in CAN activities, with the objective of adopting block positions and drafting an Andean strategy for the information and knowledge society.

In July 2005, the assignment of a new team to the directorship of CONATEL, SENATEL and ANC[18] intensified multisectoral coordination. This was the result of a process of internal refinement at CONATEL, through which specific responsibilities

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[15]   http://www.eventosinfolac.org/index.php
[16]   http://www.riocmsi.gov.br/english/cmsi
[17]   http://www.cepal.org/socinfo/elac/
[18]   The team that assumed the directing and coordinating possitons at CONATEL, SENATEL and ANC had experience in issues relating to the Summit.

were assigned to organise national activities for WSIS and to organise the participation in global meetings (Prepcom3 and Tunis). Various actors were called to onsite meetings to discuss the Tunis documents and provide input. Additionally, online work was established as a support mechanism for interaction and coordination. CONATEL invited various sectors to integrate the national delegation for Tunis. The delegation was made up by ten people (3 from the public sector, 1 from the private sector, 1 from universities, 1 from international organisations and 4 from civil society organisations).

Arriving in Tunis with a multisectoral delegation did not mean that there was adequate coordination. The president of the national delegation did not channel its civil society member's proposals on the definition of eLAC2007 implementation mechanisms to civil society, during GRULAC[19] meetings with the excuse of maintaining a neutral position[20].

At the Tunis Summit, governments from Latin America and the Caribbean agreed to put together a regional temporary mechanism and a calendar to implement eLAC2007, with the participation of Ecuador, Brasil, El Salvador and one CARICOM country (coordinated by Ecuador) to ensure that the member states drive the implementation of eLAC2007 "in a coordinated, organised and structured manner"[21]. The mandate of the group expires on June 30th 2006 at the latest, with the eventual establishment of a permanent regional mechanism.

The government process

Government's management for WSIS was irregular and poorly planned and coordinated. Constant changes of government in the past years have directly influenced the mobility of CONATEL and Chancillory staff because appointments are political.

Designating the governmental delegates for the PrepCom and the Summit was defined more by hierarchy than by knowledge on the issues and negotiating abilities, especially during the first phase. This meant that Ecuador's participation was extremely poor at various meetings and that it even went so far as to present contradictory positions. In certain cases, Ecuador was represented or supported by people from its diplomatic mission in Geneva.

The situation changed in the second phase. The profile of CONATEL's directive team allowed them to combine the dominance of issues and the rank for Prepcom3's, the resumed PrepCom3 and the Tunis Summit's representation. Members of this team also had a history of participation in the Summit with the private sector. There is a consensus among different stakeholders, including civil society that the participation improved, in part to the degree of the contribution received and internal organisation as well as a clearer definition of priorities and objectives.

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[19]   Group of countries from Latin America and the Caribbean
[20]   Ecuador had already nominated to assume the coordination of the eLAC2007 temporary implementation mechanism (a position that was desired by other GRULAC countries), due to which the country was in a delicate position, according to the perception of the president of the national delegation.
[21] http://www.apc.org/apps/img_upload/5ba65079e0c45cd29dfdb3e618dda731/Mecanismo_de_seguimiento_eLAC2007.doc

The current CONATEL administration recognizes that a determining factor in raising the level of participation in external negotiations in few months prior to the Summit were internal organisation and the definition of said participation as an institutional priority. The Chancellery, on the other hand, participated in a meeting on the role of chancelleries at WSIS at the beginning of the fourth trimester of 2005, in Chile.

The perception on behalf of the public officials in charge of the negotiation in the final months of phase 2, is that Ecuador was able to provide significant input at the end of the process. It did so by taking specific issues and approaches to the discussion tables, participating actively in the debates between governments and influencing the official final documents of the Summit. Furthermore, they consider that the country could intervene indirectly in the results of the Working Group on Internet Governance (GTGI)[22]. Also, Ecuador coordinated, at the petition of the governments, the regional juncture for WSIS in the last phase of the preparatory process for the Summit and this is perceived as an acknowledgement of the quality of participation of the negotiating team.

Below is a summary of the most important expectations of the public officials in charge of the process in the last stage:

It was expected that the Summit would be a successful attempt at global dialogue on internet and other ICT due to the generalised awareness that exists on the importance of these tools for social interaction and country development. The aspiration was to find conditions to generate consensus and agreements. The expectations were linked to an interest in receiving feedback on the experiences of other countries that are already further along in terms of regulation and the use of internet. The hope was to achieve the standardisation of global approaches to ICT policy and establish alignments for the formulation of adequate ICT policy for national contexts and needs. Insofar as the national scenario, the expectations were linked to the identification of the priorities of different sectors as they relate to ICT and the search for synergies to define national priorities.

The Ministry of Foreign Relations expressed that, at the beginning, the Summit was conceived as a technical rather than political process. This understanding changed. The Ministry's priority became to support the formation of a national telecommunications agenda and to obtain the INFOLAC presidency. The Latin American and Caribbean Regional technical preparatory meeting for WSIS and the X Consultative meeting for the INFOLAC programme were perceived as a break in the process, due to the increased protagonism at the regional level the country acquired since then.

On their part, members of civil society noted that the behaviour of the government, although it installed participatory, inclusive and consultative working mechanisms, they were nominal. In practice, there was no practical otucomes. In the end, the government's political verticality prevailed and this inhibited the incorporation of new and different voices for the construction of a national vision on the information society.

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[22] El actual presidente de CONATEL, que presidió la delegación nacional para Túnez, fue una de las personas elegidas para integrar el GIGT, antes de su designación para esa función pública.

According to local governments, the public institutions in charge of coordinating the participation for the Summit did not solicit their input. They also noted that the government vetoes the names they proposed to make up the Geneva Summit delegation. Because of this, they did not approach the government during the second phase.

Multistakeholder participation

The Summit opened spaces for action and multistakeholder dialogue on ICT policy. Opportunities were provided for actors and organisations working and interested in the application of ICT to meet each other. There was more direct access to government officials. However, the benefits of multistakeholder alliances were circumstantial and not always effective.

CONATEL has expressed the political will to uphold the principles of transparency, multistakeholderism and democracy for the design, implementation and follow-up of ICT policies. To that effect, a restructuring of the ANC has been proposed, in order to facilitate the formulation of information society strategies that will set the conditions for the creation of participatory, inclusive and consultative ICT policy mechanisms which could lead to public policy formulation. Nevertheless, the attempts and efforts of only one public institution do not result in profound changes of current State power structures or in methods to distribute and appropriate national resources differently. Changes in culture, planning paradigms and policymaking structures give way to the battles of groups of economic and political power. A different reality demands other conditions: strengthening the capacities of the actors for proactive and purposeful advocacy; installing effective social control and accountability mechanisms; overcoming the idea that the private sector and the provision of connectivity are the most important elements for building information and knowledge societies.

Priorities

A distinction between the priorities established in the first and second phase of the Summit must be made. For the Geneva phase, CONATEL worked on a vague position document which addresses a wide range of issues. Among them, universalising access to information and knowledge; closing the internal digital divide; strengthening infrastructure; building capacities to seize the potential of ICT; promoting different software development models according to the principle of technological neutrality; preserving the digital memory; accessing to public information; promoting intellectual property; protecting ancestral and indigenous knowledge; establishing information and knowledge networks. There was no consensus to define priorities.

The second phase was determined by the need to contribute to eLAC2007. This was done in general, without a specific issue goal. However, the interest of certain Ecuadorian governmental officials to halt or minimise the inclusion of the issue of free software is certain.

In the final months of the Tunis Summit, the negotiators manifested that the priorities were concentrated on three fronts: infrastructure, connectivity and capacity

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building. Furthermore, the government's priority was to ensure the positioning and protagonism of the country at the regional level.

For CONATEL, these priorities were directly related with national development objectives and can help to face State structural problems, such as centralism, corruption, inefficient bureaucracy and low levels of citizen participation.

Civil society, private sector, local government, academia and the consulted international organisms, for their part, affirm that in no moment were the national priorities and the specific objectives clearly established. It has been affirmed that the dominance of a techno-centrist vision and the inexistence of a holistic ICT for development public policy for Ecuador were the main reasons behind the lack of clarity on national priorities for WSIS.

Report-back and follow-up

CONATEL officials involved in WSIS activities were in charge of presenting internal reports to their superiors. No guidelines or procedures were established beyond this for feedback, or socialising and divulging the participation results among other stakeholders in any of the phases of the Summit. The exception to this is a reduced number of meetings called by CONATEL officials after the first PrepCom of the Tunis phase.

Once the Summit concluded and Ecuador was designated the coordinator of the temporary mechanism for the implementation of eLAC2007, it was expected for follow-up mechanisms to immediately be defined at the national level with the intent to actively involve national actors in the regional dynamic and ensure their inclusion in the working groups on the implementation of the regional plan of action. To date, this has not occurred.

The lack of information and the failure to call on national actors after the end of the Summit, has led various civil society organisations to formally demand information on the status of the situation and on the government agenda post-WSIS.

The Chancellery indicated that CONATEL had not yet established feedback, planning, and coordination mechanisms for a joint follow up and that the status of the process and the ways in which multisectoral participation will be channelled are unknown.

The difficulties for effective coordination between public institutions and to determine transparent, inclusive and participative multisectoral methods are evident.

In any event, CONATEL considers that the follow-up has two basic dimensions. On one hand, the implementation of eLAC2007 will demand a high degree of proactivity on behalf of the countries and will mean an important challenge to translate the goals to the national level. On the other hand, it will require a follow-up to the documents from Tunis, specifically the plan of action and its application in the national sphere. In that sense, adjustments to the legal and regulatory framework are projected as well as the national gradual in the formation of the internet governance Forum.

Civil society organisations have an interest in participating in the follow-up dynamics, both nationally and regionally but difficulties are on the horizon in terms of proving a positive cost-benefit relationship. Despite this, the phase post-Tunis is seen as even

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more important than the Summit process itself as it should be directed to concrete, applicable, and viable issues that strengthen national actors. Furthermore, the process of constituting and operating the internet governance Forum is seen as an opportunity to provide input for the construction of adequate policies to respond to human development objectives and social justice.

Other members of civil society organisations additionally identified regional and global coordinating efforts such as CRIS (Campaign for communication rights in the information society) or DECAL (Campaign for the right to communicate in Latin America), as critical involvement spaces for the post Tunis phase. They indicate that broadening the debate about the democratisation of communication and information must be projected as priority for civil society organisations. Furthermore, the understanding of issues that still distant for the general population must be deepened: internet governance, intellectual property, security, privacy, among others. Finally, ties must be established between different social movements.

The local government actor considers it is important to rescue the good practices from which guidelines may arise to begin new initiatives and even implement the same goals established in the regional and global plans of action that resulted from WSIS.

Those involved in the process agree in their fears on the advances that for better or worse in ICT policy that have taken place around the country run the risk of being diluted by the change in leadership at CONATEL, the Chancellery and other public institutions, caused by the arrival to power of a new government in 2007. It is very plausible for these fears to become reality if multistakeholder participation mechanisms are not defined and approved within the formal ICT policymaking and public management structure.

Civil society engagement

Few civil society organisations participated in WSIS, despite the fact that there is an important precedent of cooperation and advocacy, such as the community radio movement and other social movements involving communication. The engagement of organisations in the process, from national, but aiming towards regional and global participation, had different motivations and took off with different expectations.

Some actors only participated in the initial stage of the first phase in Geneva and experienced temporary disenchantment; others persevered until Tunis, with certain periods of more intense participation. Some limited their participation to national dynamics, others to regional and global ones, and a few to both.

In spite of the scepticism and the doubts on the effective results of the events, WSIS was seen as a valuable opportunity for issues of interest to civil society to become part of public debate. It was also understood as the opportunity to catalyse interactions, relationships, joint actions, and political proposals. The approach took place due to the profound conviction that it was necessary to counteract the Summit's techno-centrist slant and influence its modification.

Other organisations, besides the mentioned position, assigned delegates to carry out

alternative information coverage and to raise awareness among other organisations on the importance and the impact of the issues. Without prior intention, some actors were deeply immersed in efforts to facilitate the coordination of civil society nationally, regionally and globally.

The aspirations had to do also with influencing and nourishing internal discussions - especially the governmental one- regarding the configuration of the information society in such manner that it would include and balance the interests of different national stakeholders. In more specific domains, the objectives of some of the actors were related to build consensus on internet governance models and encourage specific recommendations for the creation and operation of the Forum on the subject.

The early and almost absolute feeling of disenchantment prevailed in the local government actor who failed to have any expectations from the very beginning. He preferred to have faith in local governments own abilities and strengths to access and use ICT, although this often meant that processes were slowed down and great difficulties arose. Often, they obtain more real and long-lasting results.

Members of civil society organisations faced serious difficulties. Their participation was numerically weak due to a lack of resources. Lack of knowledge of the issues was another factor that ensured that the degree to which the actors were engaged was limited, even at the national level. The issues were conceived as requiring expertise.

Nevertheless, it is understood that civil society actors from Latin America and other developing countries provided valuable experience to the issues and their focus. Even in the case of Ecuador, there were moments in which the official negotiating team found support in the ability of civil society delegates to understand the issues.

The formal results of the Summit are seen as limited. There are many informal results and these are, undoubtedly, the most important. They involve the maturing of the national, regional and global coordination of civil society, networking, the diversity of dialogue, the torrent of ideas and visions, the different forms of social organizing and the existence of complementary objectives, acknowledging the existence of diversity and the search for adequate technical and political approaches for multiple and different realities. The wealth of the Summit lies therein.

The issue of strengthening national networks in coordination with WSIS is worth highlighting. To this end, an illustrative example is Infodesarrollo.EC[23], which defined national strategies for the WSIS as one of its punctual points of influence. Despite it joined the process late, it was able to incorporate individuals and organisations that were active in the WSIS process (such as ALAI, APC, ALER) as strategic allies. This enabled it to update its internal team on issues in a fast and effective way. Hence, Infodesarrollo.EC became an important source of reference.

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[23] Ecuadorian Information and Communication for Development Network (Red Ecuatoriana de Información y Comunicación para el Desarrollo) consists of national organisations whose mission is to promote the creation and exchange of information, methodologies, experiences and knowledge on Information Communication Technologies (ICT) for development, and to foment participative

The possibility of reaching basic consensus did not annul multistakeholder ICT public policy processes in Ecuador. http://www.infodesarrollo.ec/content/view/84/187/lang,es/

Private sector engagement

The participation of individuals from the Ecuadorian private sector can be qualified as sporadic, isolated and unplanned. This is particularly true in the case of the private sector linked to telecommunication, mass media and the software industry. The limited activity in the national and global spheres is perceived as a limited vision in the sense that businesses are very concentrated in areas where market forces generate the highest returns without leaving room for their inclusion in processes of a different nature. As the introduction to this report made clear, the perspective that determines public planning in telecommunications in Ecuador is the strengthening of the openly competitive regime. Market rationality is prevalent and there are restrictions that inhibit the government from directly offering telecommunication services. This provides territory for private enterprises to ensure their earnings, rely on a favourable regulatory framework for their activities. Furthermore, it removes the need of business to participate in ICT policy processes directly.

4. INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH WSIS

Participation in PrepComs, regional meetings and regional coordination

The constant characteristic for national participation was the changes in relation to the negotiating teams. The norm was that Ecuador was represented by one, two or, in the best of cases, three officials in the regional and preparatory committees of both WSIS phases.

During the first phase, Telecommunications Superintendency officials were members of the teams. The regional Geneva and Tunis phase preparatory conferences were attended by CONATEL and SENATEL representatives.

Members of civil society were invited at different moments to be part of the different negotiating teams but they not always accepted, particularly during the highly questioned presidential periods due to corruption, nepotism, and the poor management of fundamental national strategic areas.

A more consistent, informed and prepared participation was observed in the regional preparatory conferences in which the acting public officials played an active and, to a certain degree, leadership role.

Ecuador was submerged, during WSIS 2 in the dynamics of CAN. The Ministry of Foreign Relations, with the support of CONATEL and regional organisations like ASETA, spearheaded the efforts to organise national participation at that level.

Participation in the Summit

The country had official representation in Geneva and Tunis. The representation in Geneva was scarce. The chief of the Ecuadorian diplomatic mission in said country presided it.

A broader, multistakeholder delegation presided by CONATEL was formed for Tunis. For CONATEL, Tunis represented the opportunity to speak on behalf of the

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Government in the official plenary and affirm its leadership within GRULAC insofar as the implementation of eLAC2007 is concerned. The official speech emphasised a vision in which the information and knowledge society is an essential historical opportunity for countries in the periphery, including Ecuador to make the definite development leap.

Relationships with other developing countries

For the first phase of the Summit, no interaction took place between Ecuador and other developing countries except for what had been negotiated at the regional preparatory conference for the first phase and the elaboration and approval of the Bávaro declaration.

An important aspect of the last phase of the Summit was the coordination with the general Secretariat of CAN. The Andean group had physical and virtual meetings parallel and following the PrepComs. During these meetings, it became obvious that the Andeans had a difficult time reaching holistic national positions. Although this hindered the creation of common positions for negotiations, it at least allowed for the improvement of the relationships between countries.

The exchange and coordination with developing countries of other regions, such as Africa and Asia was practically inexistent. Some coordinated actions were established for the debate on internet governance. Ecuador was part of the informal working group made up by Uruguay, Argentina, Mexico, Singapur, Canada, Norway and Japan from which various criteria on the subject arose.

Different levels or coordination existed to develop the regional documents of the second phase (regional plan of action eLAC2007 and the Rio commitment). Beyond this, there was no coincidence or unity of criteria on subjects of transcendence for developing countries.

The weakening and low level of consolidation of the regional and sub-regional blocks of Latin America to face ICT policy issues, are notorious. Even groups that are consolidated in other fora and act cohesively on other issues, like MERCOSUR, had opposing positions for WSIS. The weight of developing countries was extremely weak when faced by the groups of emerging powers that circumstantially arose for the Summit, like Brasil, India, and China for matters pertaining to internet governance; or faced with blocks of countries like the European Union that demonstrated an advanced regionalisation and unification process.

5.   RELATIONSHIP   BETWEEN   THE   WSIS   PROCESS   AND   OTHER INTERNATIONAL ICT POLICY DECISION MAKING PROCESSES

No systematic planning and coordination parametres existed within the government on the Ecuadorian negotiations relating to WSIS and what is discussed in other policy processes such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the Free Trade Agreement with United States and the negotiations with specialised organisations like the WTO, WIPO and the ITU.

There has been, particularly, certain coordination between the private sector and governmental entities to address some of the specific issues, such as that which

relates to intellectual property, the transfer of technology, and electronic commerce, among others, within the framework of the OMC and WIPO but outside the WSIS process itself. Ecuador has ratified the majority of the multilateral judicial tools relating to intellectual property, in other words, the agreements on Trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS). The private sector demonstrated a high degree of organisation and direct participation with the government in the Free Trade Agreement negotiations, through business committees for several of the issues addressed, including telecommunications. No regular methods of coordination with the public institutions in charge of the issue were established; nor has there been a link between the civil society organisations that provide follow-up and generate proposals for the Free Trade Agreement and FTAA, for example, with those that are active in communication and ICT policy, especially within the context of WSIS.

6. LEGACY OF WSIS ON ICT ISSUES AND DECISION MAKING PROCESSES. VISIONS ON THE IMPACT OF THE RESULTS.

There are different readings from the actors on the results and impact of WSIS. On one hand, there is an overemphasis on behalf of governmental actors on the value and weight of the resulting action guidelines. On the other hand, an almost absolute scepticism on the part of civil society regarding the viability and relevance of said guidelines within the national context. The actors agree, nevertheless, in that crucial issues for developing countries were left out or only partially addressed.

In this sense, the most serious and complex problems to build fair and inclusive societies in which ICT are used to obtain real, holistic development and to strengthen democracy were not addressed. The results in relation to the issues the WSIS addressed were lukewarm.

The approval of the creation of the internet governance Forum is seen as the most important achievement of the Summit. Members of the government think that it presents opportunities to restructure the political framework of the information society at a global scale. According to them, the main legacy of the Summit is the guidance provided on the principles that should direct national strategies: multistakeholderism, transparency, and democracy. Furthermore, there is the belief that the Summit undermined the hegemonic capacity of certain countries, mostly the United States, in regards to essential issues such as, privacy, security and internet governance.

Members of civil society view the inability of the Summit to obtain official agreements on the issue of financing and its incapability to establish new cooperation paradigms as a failure. They see the greatest progress made on the issue of internet governance. The success of having opened an international and multilateral debate on the issue and having approved the creation of a Forum, will depend on the way in which it is implemented, the mechanisms for multistakeholder participation, the commitment to put them into practice, the financial resources destined to its operations and halting the possible boycott attempts from entities with geopolitical power.

Civil society representatives recognize that there were relative achievements regarding acknowledging the importance of viewing the development of the

information society from a rights perspective. The vision and focus of ICT for development are perceived as one of the aspects that had a weak presence in the debates and proposals. They maintain that it is early to affirm whether there will be a positive impact in the national ICT policy making structure but that the possibility of opening multistakeholder dialogues and having improved planning, coordination and action abilities are envisioned.

From the point of view of the Chancellery, the Summit allowed the addition of a new dimension to the responsibilities of Ecuadorian diplomacy and makes the need to broaden and strengthen it so that it carries out an efficient management based on principles of national sovereignity.

The joint conclusion reached by the different actors is that the attention was called to the the fact that ICT policies and internet governance are global problems of great dimensions and they should not be in the hands of an elite if they are expected to serve the purpose of development and strengthening democracy.

7. MEDIA COVERAGE AND THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC DEBATE

WSIS was an event that went by practically unnoticed by the majority of the population. The meetings and issues that it dealt with were generally absent from the media's agenda. This reflects the low profile that the event had within the government during its two phases. It also reflects the low level of knowledge on ICT policy issues and their impact, even at the level of mass media. The public entities in charge of the issue, limited themselves to making public statements on the fact that the Summit was taking place. The sporadic attempts they made to get media to participate in the national dynamic were ignored.

There were alternative civil society initiatives to dissemínate information and inform on the dynamics and issues of the Summit. These activities were generated in Ecuador in light of the presence of the headquarters and work team of some regional and global communication networks. They were, however, more directed at regional channels than national ones.

Mass media is not providing enough information to generate public opinion on the information society that goes beyond its technological aspects. Nevertheless, some have begun to take an interest in the subject of free software and the interconnection costs, from a social impact and development perspective. It is to be hoped that the challenge of addressing crucial issues relating to ICT with the intent of fomenting a broad, objective and informed debate will be assumed by media in Ecuador.

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