



**WOUNET Participation in the WSIS
WSIS Gender Caucus: Towards an African Regional Strategy
Nile Hotel, Kampala, May 4, 2003.**

1. Introduction

WOUNET was initiated in May 2000 by several women organisations in Uganda to promote the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) among women as tools to share information and address issues collectively. We define ICTs to include email, the web, radio, television and print media. However, our emphasis is directed towards email and the web, and how these technologies can be integrated with traditional means of information exchange and dissemination for maximum outreach.

The premise of the World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS) is to declare a common desire and commitment to build an information society based on the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this society, new technologies - in particular ICTs - become an essential tool, accessible to all. In Uganda, while 80% of the Ugandan population lives in rural areas, the bulk of communication services are only available in urban areas. Further, while women are particularly affected by this skewed availability of communication services being that the majority of women are based in rural areas, effective participation of women in the information society is required if national development objectives are to be met.

In this context, WOUNET has welcomed the opportunity to be engaged with the WSIS process. In this presentation, we highlight the various ways in which WOUNET has been variously engaged to-date.

2. WOUNET participation in the WSIS Gender Caucus

WOUNET's initiation to the WSIS process was via participation at the WSIS Africa Regional Preparatory Meeting held in May 2002 in Bamako, Mali. WOUNET was among twenty-two organisations invited to participate at this meeting by UNIFEM. It was at this meeting that the WSIS Gender Caucus was initiated.

The WSIS Gender Caucus is a multi-stakeholder group consisting of representatives of parliaments, national governments, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and the United Nations system. The Gender Caucus was initiated to ensure that gender dimensions are included in the process of defining and creating a Global Information Society that contributes to sustainable development and human security.

Since then, WOUGNET has remained an active participant in the WSIS Gender Caucus. WOUGNET currently hosts a website and administers email services (including the WSIS Gender Caucus mailing list). The Caucus website is hosted at:
<http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/wsiscg.html>.

3. WOUGNET participation in international WSIS-related activities

WOUGNET has also participated in and made available to members information about WSIS-related activities, including:

- a) November 2002 Addis Workshop on ICT Policy and the Civil Society
http://africa.rights.apc.org/workshop_dec_eng.shtml
- b) UNESCO Online Forum for Civil Society
<http://wsisforum.unesco.org>
- c) WSIS NGO Gender Strategies Working Group
<http://mailman.greennet.org.uk/mailman/listinfo/ngowomen>

WOUGNET is also a member of the WSIS Africa Civil Society Caucus:
<http://mailman.greennet.org.uk/mailman/listinfo/africa>

4. WOUGNET participation in the national WSIS-related activities

WOUGNET is a member of the National WSIS Taskforce. In preparation for PrepCom 2, WOUGNET recommended the following documents as useful in understanding the issues for women's participation in the WSIS process and in providing suggestions and recommendations for gender equality and increased women's participation in the WSIS process in Uganda:

- a) Bamako 2002 Africa Regional WSIS PrepCom statement
<http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/genderstatement.html>
- b) WSIS Gender Caucus submission to the Prepcom II, Geneva
<http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/wsiscdocs.html>
- c) Civil Society November 2002 Addis Workshop statement
http://africa.rights.apc.org/workshop_dec_eng.shtml

In addition, during a February 2003 public consultative meeting on Uganda's national position on the WSIS, WOUGNET made a submission with additions and amendments to Uganda's working document. The objective of the submission was to address the need to incorporate a gender-sensitive perspective to the document. This submission is available online at:

<http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/ug/uganda2submission.html>

5. WOUGNET WSIS-related activities

a) Free Software and Open Source Foundation for Africa

During the Civil Society November 2002 Addis workshop, the need for developing a framework for Open Source Software solutions emerged strongly. Consequently, the working group on Information Security, Applications Development (Open Source) unanimously resolved to create itself into an interim civil society task force on open source to be called 'Open Source Task Force for Africa - OSTA'. The overall goal of the taskforce was to bring together individuals and organizations working on open source in Africa and consequently seek mandate to establish the 'Open Source Foundation for Africa' during the WSIS PrepCom meeting in February 2003. WOUGNET was a member of the interim civil society task force.

The Free Software and Open Source Foundation for Africa (FOSSFA) was launched on February 21, 2003 during the WSIS PrepCom2. The launch was attended by representatives of government delegations, international organizations and the media. During the PrepCom, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana and South Africa Government delegations were particularly instrumental in pushing the Open Source agenda for inclusion of the WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action. The Foundation will now begin its work by focusing on three thematic areas:

- Open Source in Government
- Open Source in Health
- Open Source in Education

FOSSFA Proposed Action Plan 2003-2005

The FOSSFA secretariat has been working on the structure and action plan for the FOSSFA, and invites comments to the proposed Action Plan 2003-2005. A copy of the action plan is available online at: <http://www.wougnnet.org/ICTpolicy/opensource.html>

FOSSFA Knowledge Database

FOSSFA is calling for individuals and organizations working or interested in Free Software and Open Source to submit their contact details so that a knowledge database can be developed. As a member of FOSSFA, WOUGNET is gathering contact information for those interested in participating in the activities for Free Software and Open Source in Africa. Information about this project is available online at:

<http://www.wougnnet.org/ICTpolicy/opensource.html>

b) Online Forum: An Information Society of Uganda (ISUG)

Following the WSIS PrepCom II in Geneva, two basic working documents were produced: a draft Declaration of Principles and a draft Plan of Action. Comments to the two working documents should be submitted by May 31, 2003. To facilitate contribution to the documents, WOUGNET hosted an online forum 'An Information Society of Uganda' from April 14-30, 2003. The specific objectives of the online forum were to:

- Identify the key principles that should underline an Information Society in Uganda

- Identify specific actions that are priority in order to ensure equitable access by all within the Information Society
- Identify the role of civil society in the development of ICTs and equitable information access in Uganda

A report is currently being produced based on the contributions during the ISUG online forum. The report will be presented to the National WSIS Taskforce and comments channeled to the WSIS Secretariat via the WSIS Africa Caucus. The report will also be made available online at the forum website: <http://www.wougnet.org/WSIS/ug/isug.html>

6. Conclusion

WOUGNET welcomes the opportunity presented by this meeting of the WSIS Gender Caucus to discuss an African Regional Strategy. We appreciate the generosity of UNIFEM in facilitating the meeting, and look forward to learning, sharing and strategizing with fellow meeting participants.

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