

Addressing the Digital Disparity of Indigenous Peoples

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Executive Summary

The age of digital revolution has inadvertently linked social, economic, and political opportunity to the ability to access and engage with facets of information and communication technologies (ICTs). This situation is particularly true among Indigenous Peoples. Whilst being extensively diverse and dispersed worldwide, Indigenous Peoples share experience of socioeconomic disadvantage and injustice. That said, by virtue of digital disparity of access and capacity, Indigenous Peoples are less capable to participate in the digital revolution. This disparity is inflicted by many facets, including technical obstacles (i.e., connectivity, infrastructure, costs, bandwidth), lack of expertise (i.e., domination of the English language, lack of community support, absence of teachers), and self-exclusion. The latter takes root at the potentiality of ICTs in becoming a medium for indirect colonization marked by the pervasive western influence and the absence of governance and legal protection for indigenous knowledge, traditions, and intellectual property. Thereby risking cultural erosion, behavioral/moral changes, and increase of health issues among Indigenous Peoples. Nevertheless, although ICTs itself forge various ways and means beneficial for Indigenous Peoples, constrained access, or lack thereof (including unwillingness to), may contribute to perpetuate exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities. As endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly, per Resolution 56/183 of 2001, concerns regarding Indigenous Peoples accessibility and participation in ICTs were addressed in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The summit was held in two phases: Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005.

WSIS in Two Phases:

Geneva Phase

The main objective of the Geneva Phase was to nurture collective political will and put together the groundwork for an “Information Society for all” that cogitates about different interests of stakeholders in attendance. The summit was attended by over 11,000 participants from 175 countries.

Within the same environment as the Summit was the Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society (GFIPIS). The forum was attended by various groups of Indigenous Peoples, the Government of Canada, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and other UN agencies and organizations.

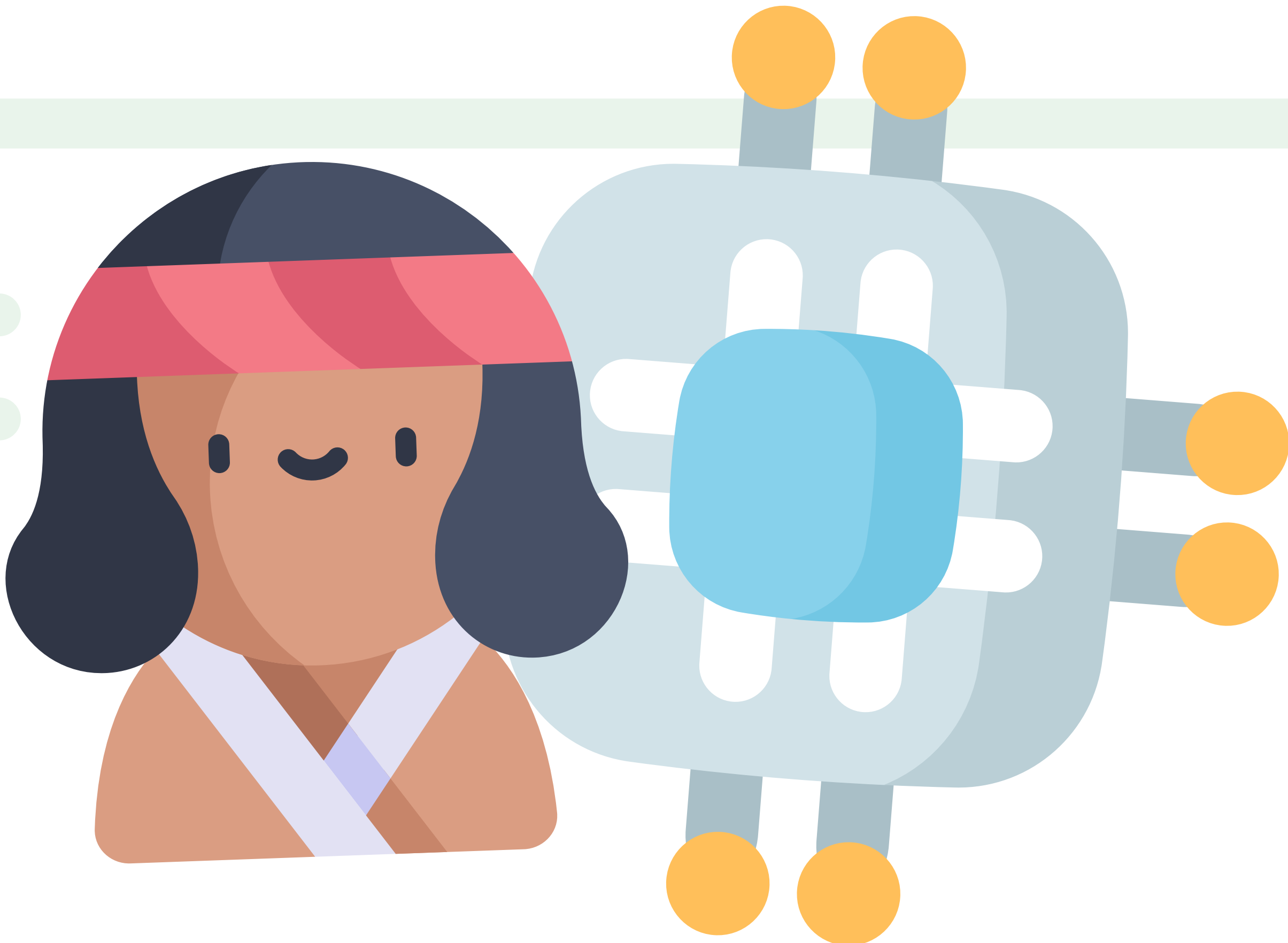
The Geneva Phase birthed two major documents. First, the WSIS Declaration of Principles, which provides basic guidance to various parties of interest in ensuring the quality of life of Indigenous Peoples through the usage of ICTs. The second document is the Geneva Plan of Action, whereby the concerns of Indigenous Peoples are included; particularly in Action Line C1, C4, and C8.

Tunis Phase

As an ensuing event, the Summit held at Tunis aimed at putting the Geneva Plan of Action into motion, reaching agreements pertaining internet governance, financing mechanisms, and exchanging insights for further implementations of the Geneva and Tunis documents. The Tunis phase was attended by over 19,000 participants from 174 countries.

Occurring in parallel with the Summit was the Indigenous Peoples and the Information Society. The event discussed the potentiality of creating international connectivity among Indigenous Peoples by crafting a web portal, particularly to function in the post-WSIS environment.

In relation to both phases, WSIS generated numerous other positive outcomes for the Indigenous People. As such, the establishment of the International Indigenous ICT Task Force (IITF), an Indigenous-led NGO tasked with preserving the pursuit of mandates in the post-summit environment. What is more is the collaborative effort between International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UNESCO, and UNDP in facilitating continuous efforts to implement the Geneva Plan of Actions. Said collaboration is obviously not excluding direct participation and partnerships with Indigenous Peoples.



Role of Indigenous Peoples in ICTs Innovation

Under the framework of Indigenous Peoples, ICTs related innovations can be categorized into three perspectives: pro-Indigenous (for Indigenous), para-Indigenous (with Indigenous), and per-Indigenous (by indigenous). This categorization system is adapted from Richard Heek’s innovation perspective across poor people.

The main standpoint of the WSIS summit is to emphasize the importance of and demand more para- and per-Indigenous ICT initiatives. The post-WSIS environment began to witness an emerging trend of innovations in noteworthy Indigenous media which respond to the local needs and wants. These initiatives can be categorized across one or two perspectives, though the sample cases provided below are not entirely comprehensive for there are still narrowed gaps in information and data.

Pro-Indigenous	• Indigenous Film Fellowship (IFF) by International Sámi Film Center (ISF) • ICT4AID by UNESCO • Community Participatory Mapping and Resource Inventory of Indigenous Peoples’ Territories Workshop by the Tebtebba Foundation.
Para-Indigenous	• Open Data Kit by Google and the Surui Community of Brazil • iCount by Nokia, UNICEF, and the island nation Vanuatu • Governance out of the Box (GooB) by CMI and Indigenous Peoples of Liberia
Per-Indigenous	• The World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Networks (WITBN) • Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) by Inuit filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk

Recommendation(s) for Future Endeavors

In line with principles of partnership and mutual respect as set out by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) of 2007, the following are recommendations to ensure sufficient participation of Indigenous Peoples across all stages of ICT development, programming, usage, regulatory implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

1. To underscore para- and per-Indigenous methodologies as the primarily cause for development.
2. To prioritize the expansion of wireless regional area networks (WRAN) capacity for the purpose of widening the area of internet accessibility.
3. Endorse governance measures and programs that highlight media pluralism and inclusivity.
4. Consider all types of ICTs that may be more accessible for Indigenous Peoples.
5. Take concrete action in addressing disaggregated data of Indigenous Peoples.
6. To arrange consistent and holistic support throughout the WSIS process and beyond to ensure successful implementation of long-term goals.
7. Minimize Indigenous Peoples' negative perception toward ICTs by adopting culturally sensitive E-governance regulatory systems.



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