



**Civil Society Working Group on Scientific Information  
WSIS-SI**

<http://www.wsis-si.org>

Geneva, 18 May 2006 V2

An informal proposal to the  
**Commission on Science & Technology for Development  
(CSTD) ECOSOC**

International Think Tank  
"Resource Network for the Information Society" (RNIS)  
<http://www.rnis.org>

Ressource internationale de réflexions  
"Réseaux de Ressources pour la Société de l'Information"(RRSI)

The CSTD should be keen to facilitate the involvement of scientists, and of the academic community in general, in order to bridge the digital divide and to reach a worldwide knowledge society of shared knowledge, in particular within the context of the implementation of the WSIS. The Information Society depends inherently on science and technology. This fact legitimates the eminent role of the CSTD in the WSIS implementation and follow-up process.

Currently academics have administrative difficulties in proposing a public policy proposal, or even to send informational notes to concerned organizations. Academics, within the framework of their work, may easily write reports and/or formulate recommendations but only if they are asked to

do so by a third party. In turn, said third party, most often an international organization, that has requested the report, may use this report to formulate recommendations.

There is a huge loss of information and good proposals, because all the burden lies on a few international organizations that have not the manpower to achieve the impossible task to be kept updated of scientific development and informed of interesting proposals that are not even publicized. Governments, International Organizations as well as the world public opinion are reproaching scientists their “ivory tower” attitude : their unwillingness to provide much needed expertise, their lack of societal concern and concrete proposals for pressing worldwide developmental issues.

It must be appreciated however, that, in reality, it is not their faults. It is difficult, if not impossible, for most academics to take the initiative to participate to public policy debate such as the WSIS, and to make public policy recommendations or even to send informational notes within the administrative framework of their own work at their institution. The reasons are simply that the statutes of their own laboratory and/or their institution have not foreseen such an evolution when science and technology plays such a crucial role in the very fabrics of the society, such as the information society. There are very few institutions whose statutes allow explicitly for participation in the elaboration of national policy. Lacking those statutes, many academic institutions are reluctant to become accredited to international organizations, therefore preventing academics from participating to international policy dialogs within the framework of their institutional position.

A very few academics still manage to participate to public policy debates, with the framework of an external association or NGO, within an individual citizen context, but the situation is ambiguous and not satisfactory, because, they have difficulties to commit scientific, technical, human and financial resources to this task.

In order to overcome those administrative rigidities, it is propose to form a think tank *stricto sensu*, which means a non-profit, independent, permanent, non governmental organization with the encouragement, or under the aegis of the CSTD or UNCTAD. It is proposed to call this think tank : the “Resource Network for the Information Society” or **RNIS**. The web site <http://www.rnis.org> has been reserved with this provisional logo :



In practice, this would work as follows : an academic would contact the RNIS with a brief suggestion of a proposal of a policy study and/or activity. The RNIS would authenticate the origin of the proposal, and after eliminating the hopefully very few bogus or irrelevant proposals, would send the academic a formal letter inviting said academic to make the proposed study and/or to perform the proposed activity.

The RNIS would not commit itself to bring financial resources, but it would allow said academic to formally commit existing internal resources or to find external resources for this task. Then the academic might achieve his/her said study and/or recommendation drafting, might perform said activity, under the legal umbrella of the RNIS. The academic might formally present recommendation either under the name of the RNIS or another entity ( eg NGO ) , as determined jointly by the RNIS and the scientist. The RNIS would act as a facilitator.

Furthermore, laboratories or components of academic institutions that are allowed by their own academic statutes, or by specific administrative decisions, to participate to public policy debates and proposals could become associated with the RNIS, providing a permanent set of resources upon which the RNIS may rely upon, if there are specific requests of expertise, of policy study, by governments, international organization and other entities.

It is suggested that the RNIS would be legally created as a non-profit swiss foundation based in Geneva. The founding members being the CSTD, or the ECOSOC or the UNCTAD ( whatever way that is determined to be legally possible ) and/or any concerned government on a voluntary basis, a little like the digital solidarity fund. The executive secretariat of the RNIS would be provided by UNCTAD.

The RNIS could also explore ways to receive external financial funding, either from governments or from philanthropic organizations, that it could receive in a transparent way, as a non-profit, independent foundation. Those fundings should neither influence nor alter the independence of the RNIS foundation.

It is therefore proposed that the CSTD, in this ninth current session, should approve the principle of the formation of such a think tank and form an

*ad hoc* working group with the assistance of UNCTAD to determine the exact legal framework of this think tank. The proposed tentative text of the CSTD decision could be as followed :

*The CSTD finds that ( due mostly to existing administrative or regulatory obstacles within academic institutions ) there a need of a permanent, independent, non-profit, non-governmental entity to facilitate academics in their contribution in making policy proposals towards the development of the information society and;*

*approves the principle of the formation of such a facilitation entity towards this end, and;*

*mandates UNCTAD to study and determine, within an open-ended multi-stakeholder approach, the suitable legal format for such a facilitation structure.*

In parentheses : ( *optional text* ).

Alternatively, the finding could put in the *findings* section of the CSTD report.