

WSIS Forum Takeaways: Collaboration for the benefit of humanity

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We live in a world ruled by interconnectivity where everything must evolve together.

Scientists and engineers, once confined to their labs, are now bringing new dimensions to their work, taking into account, political, economic, social and ethical considerations. One of the occasions during which such a synergic interaction and collaboration with policy makers and civil society organizations takes place is the [World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\) Forum](#). The WSIS Forum strives to drive the implementation of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to achieve the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The annual event gathers stakeholders, politicians, academia, technical communities and international organizations to share knowledge and collaborate to achieve the SDGs. The forum provided opportunities for discussion about several topics like connecting the unconnected, gender equality, ethical dimensions of ICTs, Artificial Intelligence and others. Throughout the event, participants worked to discuss and solve problems while building confidence and partnerships. The 2017 event was also a window to what other people are working on around the world. This not only allowed participants to be inspired by other projects but also incited them to build partnerships, gain support and learn from others' experiences.

The forum took place in Geneva, Switzerland, from June 12-16. I participated as part of the IEEE Tunisia Special Interest Group on Humanitarian Technologies (SIGHT) Team WSIS Forum Fellows. This year's WSIS Forum witnessed the very first edition of the [WSIS Hackathon](#) co-organized by IEEE and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The forum was great and the hackathon was the icing on the cake, bringing people from different nationalities and ages forming teams and working during a very short amount of time to come up with solutions to health related themes. The hackathon addressed four challenges: Clean water Access, Urban Environmental Quality, Managing Non-Communicable Diseases for Healthy Living and Promoting Health Behaviors.

My team and I decided to work on the Urban Environmental Quality challenge. We devised a system called Purify IT that monitors and limits air pollution. Through a network of sensors, the system collects data and sends feedback to the government and citizens with regular updates on the CO2 emission rate. The solution allows the citizens to be part of the change-making process by installing sensors in their homes and in return draw many benefits, such as getting reductions on public transportation fees. While working on the hackathon, I realized that Purify IT might actually see the light one day as a SIGHT project. After a sleepless night we pitched the project to the jury and received third place for the first edition of the WSIS Hackathon.

On Tuesday, June 13, [IEEE SIGHT](#) Tunisia was recognized and awarded as a [WSIS Champion](#) for category C4: capacity building for our project TAWASOL, receiving a certificate from the ITU Secretary-General, Mr. Houlin Zhao. It was quite an honor for us to be awarded as WSIS Champions, although TAWASOL is still making its very first steps and is entirely led by students, unlike most other WSIS champions and winners' projects that are government initiatives.

The WSIS Forum allowed us to shed light on TAWASOL and talk more about our work to a lot of people, from students our age to ministers and government officials. The enthusiasm that people showed towards our work only inspires us and motivates us to keep up the hard work. Throughout the forum, we met people whose work goes in parallel to ours. We exchanged knowledge and discussed our strengths and weaknesses and how we can further advance our work. Such events provide the perfect atmosphere for exchanging information in a mutual process of learning.

On Thursday, June 15, IEEE SIGHT Tunisia was present on an IEEE panel titled Ethical Dimensions of ICTs, where Ichrak Mars, participated as a panelist and talked about TAWASOL as far as privacy and security aspects are concerned. We also participated in a World Café which was yet another opportunity to network and discuss our project with other WSIS Champions and Winners.

On Friday, June 16, the WSIS Forum was coming to an end. We saved our best performance for the last day when we did a flash session where everyone walking by could assist and hear about TAWASOL, ask questions and interact with us. Last but not least, we participated in the Knowledge Café by IEEE, where we had the chance to work in a very interactive way on answering several questions revolving around Building Blocks of Trust in the Digital Age.

The core mission of the WSIS Forum actually falls into the same essence as the IEEE's vision which is Advancing Technology for the Benefit of Humanity. The work that is being carried out on a large scale by UN organizations, most notably the ITU, to achieve the SDGs is being performed by the IEEE and SIGHT groups in particular. Our work highlights the use of technology in order to solve problems within our communities. This is what we are doing in Tunisia as part of TAWASOL, similar to a large group of SIGHT members around the globe who manage to identify difficulties in their communities and engage in solving these problems by implementing their engineering skills.