

1. What are the most important **achievements** arising from WSIS that should be highlighted in the Zero Draft? *

WSIS has played a pivotal role in bringing the developing world online and using it to leverage technology for economic and social development. The WSIS process has significantly advanced global digital inclusion by expanding connectivity, fostering capacity-building, and enabling digital transformation in countries and communities that were previously underserved.

WSIS provided a clear political mandate and institutional framework to prioritize ICTs for development. It catalyzed coordinated international action to close the digital divide resulting in a dramatic increase in access to the Internet, particularly in the developing world. The rise in connectivity—from just 17% of the world's population in 2005 to over 68% today (1)—has been one of the most tangible and inclusive development outcomes of the WSIS process. This progress reflects the combined efforts of governments, regional organizations, private sector actors, and the technical community working in partnership with multilateral and national development agencies.

At the core of these successes has been the multistakeholder model WSIS created as a default, WSIS set as the default, recognizing that sustainable digital development depends on the coordinated efforts of governments, civil society, the private sector, and the technical and academic communities. The operationalization of this model through the creation of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the expansion of national, regional, and youth IGFs (NRIs) has enabled locally relevant dialogue and action, helping developing countries shape digital policy and build institutional capacity in ways aligned with their own priorities. This collaborative approach has also been mainstreamed in multilateral Internet policy development more broadly, from the role of stakeholders in standards development at the ITU and other institutions to the engagement of stakeholders in OECD and UNCTAD Internet-related policy discussions.

From a technical perspective, WSIS helped legitimize and globalize the governance of core Internet infrastructure. It has reinforced principles of openness, interoperability, and decentralization, and empowered developing countries to adopt and deploy resilient digital infrastructure, including through community networks and localized capacity building. Technical achievements such as the expansion of secure routing systems, the deployment of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs), and progress on universal acceptance have further enabled meaningful participation in the digital ecosystem across languages, scripts, and regions.

WSIS has also contributed to anchoring digital policy in shared norms and institutions, helping to build trust, predictability, and coordination across borders. In doing so, it has laid a durable foundation for global digital cooperation that continues to evolve as technologies and development needs change.

In short, WSIS should be recognized as a global development success story: one that has not only expanded access to the Internet but also empowered developing countries to shape their digital futures through shared governance, cooperation, and capacity building. The 20-year review of WSIS should endorse the continuation of this model.

1. <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2024/11/10/ff24-internet-use/#chart-1>

2. What are the most important **challenges** to the achievement of WSIS outcomes to date and in the future that need to be addressed in the Zero Draft? *

While WSIS implementation has driven significant global progress, critical challenges remain, particularly in ensuring continuity, coherence, and inclusion across the digital governance ecosystem as well as closing the remaining digital divide.

A major challenge has been the lack of coordination between key WSIS-related processes and fora, particularly the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the WSIS Forum, and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD). These platforms each have complementary strengths: multistakeholder engagement and collaboration (IGF), coordination of practical action delivering WSIS' development outcomes through the Action Lines (WSIS Forum), and intergovernmental policy outcomes and WSIS implementation monitoring (CSTD). Each has a key role to play but they are relatively siloed, with minimal coordination between them, shared agenda-setting, or cross-participation. This limits the system's ability to deliver on WSIS outcomes in a coherent and inclusive manner.

To address this, the Zero Draft should support a continuum of WSIS-aligned processes where these platforms collaborate more deliberately to leverage their distinct roles and foster inclusive participation. This can be done without changing the fundamental objectives or activities of each. One way forward could involve identifying annual or biennial cross-cutting themes, addressed respectively through each forum's unique lens: policy dialogue (IGF), reporting/monitoring/coordination of multilateral action line delivery (WSIS Forum), and intergovernmental consensus (CSTD). This alignment would enhance the value of outcomes of all three and could be largely accomplished by more collaboration between their respective Secretariats.

Additional systemic challenges include:

- Persistent inequalities in access, capacity, and influence, especially among underserved regions, small operators, and communities lacking the technical, institutional, or financial means to fully participate. Empowering these actors beyond tokenistic inclusion is critical to fulfilling the WSIS vision.
- Erosion of the open and interoperable nature of the Internet, driven by fragmentation, data localization mandates, and sovereignty-based technical architectures. These trends threaten the universality and security of global digital infrastructure.
- Inconsistent application of multistakeholder principles, particularly in intergovernmental and national contexts where stakeholder engagement is procedural rather than substantive. This diminishes trust, implementation feasibility, and policy legitimacy.
- Institutional fragility, especially regarding the IGF, which continues to operate with a temporary mandate and uncertain funding. Despite its demonstrated success, this lack of structural stability undermines long-term impact and stakeholder confidence.
- Reopening of previously settled debates, such as enhanced cooperation, without recognition of past outcomes, including the work of the CSTD Working Groups on the subject and the successful IANA transition. Revisiting these issues without clear framing risks politicization and stalling progress.

Collectively, these challenges signal the need for renewed commitment to coherent, inclusive, and evidence-based cooperation anchored in the multistakeholder model and supported by a coordinated, stable, and integrated institutional ecosystem.

3. What are the most important **priorities** for action to achieve the WSIS vision of a 'people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society' in the future, taking into account emerging trends? *

To fulfil the WSIS vision in today's evolving digital context, future action must stay grounded in its original development mandate: to support inclusive digital transformation, especially in countries and communities at earlier stages of digital development. This means building on WSIS's practical success in expanding connectivity, strengthening local institutions, and enabling all countries to participate in shaping the Information Society on their own terms.

Looking forward, three mutually reinforcing priorities stand out:

1. Expand inclusive and sustainable connectivity as a development priority

Equitable access to digital infrastructure and services remains the foundation of an inclusive Information Society. Future efforts must prioritize context-driven, affordable, and sustainable models for expanding meaningful connectivity, particularly in areas that remain underserved.

This includes:

- Supporting diverse, locally appropriate infrastructure models including community networks and neutral IXPs;
- Promoting digital inclusion through local language content, services, and applications tailored to the needs of users;
- Creating enabling conditions for locally driven digital skills initiatives, grounded in educational systems, technical communities, and institutions already present in-country.
- Connectivity should be seen not only as a technical objective, but as a long-term investment in national resilience, productivity, and human development.

2. Strengthen coherence and alignment across WSIS-related processes to support national priorities

Over time, the IGF, the WSIS Forum, and the CSTD have developed distinct and complementary strengths. Yet they often operate in isolation, limiting their collective contribution to digital development.

Future efforts should seek to:

- Promote greater coordination and thematic alignment across these forums, allowing them to address shared development challenges such as connectivity gaps or linguistic inclusion, from different angles;
- Reinforce their roles as platforms policy dialogue, experience sharing, and agenda-setting, especially in support of national digital strategies;
- Ensure participation models are structured to support peer learning and cross-regional cooperation, not as external interventions but as shared efforts across diverse contexts.

Such an approach would ensure the WSIS ecosystem remains adaptable, relevant, and embedded in national and regional realities.

3. Align emerging technology governance with inclusive development objectives

Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies must serve the broader goal of digital inclusion. Governance approaches should reflect diverse development trajectories, prioritizing accessibility, trust, and social benefit.

This includes:

- Ensuring that international governance frameworks are interoperable with national policy goals and adaptable to local capacity;
- Promoting regional and cross-sector cooperation to build expertise, norms, and locally led innovation ecosystems;
- Maintaining the flexibility of the WSIS framework to incorporate emerging issues without proliferating new institutions, so that countries can focus on applying digital tools to their own priorities.

Taken together, these priorities affirm that the WSIS framework must continue to support self-determined, inclusive, and sustainable development pathways with digital cooperation grounded in national agency, peer exchange, and long-term institutional resilience.

4. What **additional themes/issues**, if any, should be included in the Elements Paper? *

We recommend stronger emphasis on institutional coordination and thematic prioritization to enhance WSIS delivery, engagement, and follow-up.

1. Strengthen coherence across IGF, WSIS Forum, and CSTD

These fora serve distinct but complementary roles. WSIS+20 should promote shared thematic priorities—such as connectivity, digital skills, and resilience—addressed from each forum's lens: policy (IGF), implementation (WSIS Forum), and intergovernmental follow-up (CSTD). This would allow stakeholders to engage through the platform most relevant to their needs, while contributing to a unified WSIS process.

2. Improve institutional alignment and follow-up

Encourage horizontal coordination between WSIS bodies. The CSTD should integrate WSIS action lines and digital development goals into its resolutions and expert workstreams, providing a stable mechanism for follow-up without duplicating structures.

3. Promote capacity building using existing resources

Rather than new funding mechanisms, WSIS should facilitate better alignment between needs and existing programs. Elevating capacity development and digital inclusion across WSIS processes, surfacing national priorities through the WSIS Forum, and enabling the CSTD/UNGIS to identify capacity gaps and coordinate existing partnerships will create a more demand-led and sustainable model of cooperation.

4. Recognize the role of technical governance bodies

WSIS should acknowledge the importance of technical infrastructure governance—such as standards-setting and routing security—without duplicating existing global functions. It should promote greater awareness of and engagement with bodies like IETF, ICANN, and RIRs, especially among countries expanding digital infrastructure.

In sum, WSIS+20 should deliver greater development impact by deepening coordination, prioritizing integration over proliferation, and leveraging existing institutions.

5. Do you wish to comment on **particular themes/issues/paragraphs** in the Elements Paper? *

Yes. We express concern over:

- The language currently used in paragraph 59: “multilateral, transparent and democratic” Internet governance reflects outdated terminology from 2003 and omits the more inclusive WSIS+10 qualifiers. The UN General Assembly’s WSIS+10 resolution (A/RES/70/125, adopted 16 December 2015) explicitly reaffirmed that Internet governance should continue to be global and multistakeholder in nature, “with the full involvement of Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, the technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders” (see paras 57–58 of the text). Adopting this precise language will:

- Align paragraph 59 with the 2015 UNGA consensus (A/RES/70/125 paras 57–58), reaffirming a well-established multistakeholder model.
- Ensure consistency with paragraph 5 of the current Elements Paper, which already commits to multistakeholder engagement.
- Signal continuity, avoid reopening settled debates and undermining UNGA consensus resolution text, and recognize the full spectrum of the Internet community.
- Paragraphs 60 and 62 (IGF) appropriately affirm the IGF’s role but should go further in proposing a permanent mandate and predictable resourcing for the IGF Secretariat, its NRIs, and intersessional work.
- Paragraph 63 on enhanced cooperation, which does not acknowledge the work of the two CSTD Working Groups on this subject or the successful conclusion of the IANA transition. The Zero Draft should avoid revisiting settled debates and instead build on the practical cooperation mechanisms that already exist.

The absence of structured feedback questions in later sections of the Elements Paper, including those on Internet governance and AI, may limit meaningful stakeholder contributions. On AI, we caution against creating parallel governance tracks or new processes, given the GDC has already created additional global processes in the International Scientific Panel and Governance dialogue and UNGA has adopted two AI specific resolutions in a short time. For the same reasons, language on data governance subjects are premature as the Working Group on Data Governance created by the GDC is still underway and will not report until UNGA’s 81st session.

The WSIS+20 process should complement the GDC and recognize the technical underpinnings of AI governance, including infrastructure, standards, and interoperability.

6. What suggestions do you have to support the development of the **WSIS framework** (WSIS Action Lines, IGF, WSIS Forum, UNGIS etc.)? *

To ensure the continued relevance and impact of the WSIS framework, the following suggestions focus on coherence, sustainability, and better alignment with development priorities while respecting the distinct roles of each component, avoiding duplication, and better utilizing existing fora to magnify their value and impact without disrupting them:

1. Make the IGF permanent, with a development-linked review cycle

The IGF remains the most inclusive global platform for dialogue on Internet-related public policy. Its multistakeholder architecture and decentralized ecosystem—including national and regional IGFs (NRIs), Dynamic Coalitions, and intersessional initiatives—have matured into a key pillar of the WSIS framework.

- Permanent institutional status should be granted to the IGF, with periodic reviews linked to WSIS milestones, to enhance strategic planning, strengthen stakeholder confidence, and promote institutional continuity.
- Stabilizing the IGF’s mandate and operations would improve participation, particularly from developing countries and local actors, and reinforce its ability to feed into broader policy discussions, including those of the WSIS Forum and CSTD.

2. Align WSIS and GDC implementation within existing structures

Rather than establishing parallel mechanisms, WSIS and GDC implementation should be jointly coordinated through existing bodies, such as:

- UNGIS, which can serve as a coordination hub across the UN system.
- The CSTD, which can integrate joint WSIS-GDC priorities into its expert group work and annual resolutions.
- The WSIS Forum and IGF, which can provide practical spaces to monitor progress, surface priorities, and foster peer learning.

This joint approach would avoid fragmentation, strengthen follow-up, and make better use of available institutional resources.

3. Use the WSIS Forum and NRIs as implementation-facing platforms

The WSIS Forum and the NRI network should be positioned as key spaces to showcase local implementation of WSIS Action Lines and development-oriented digital strategies. This includes:

- National and regional efforts to expand meaningful connectivity.
- Community-led digital inclusion and skills initiatives.
- Practical use of emerging technologies to solve real-world challenges (e.g. e-health, sustainability, resilience, public interest AI).

Such visibility helps make global frameworks real at the local level and offers feedback loops into WSIS governance processes.

4. Maintain flexibility and development relevance in the WSIS Action Lines

The Action Lines have proven durable because of their technology-agnostic, flexible design. To preserve this value:

- Action Lines should be periodically reviewed by their facilitators and participants to ensure they remain aligned with current development challenges, such as AI, cybersecurity resilience, and environmental sustainability.
- Thematic coordination (e.g. shared annual priorities across IGF, WSIS Forum, and CSTD) should allow Action Lines to remain focused while adaptable.
- The Action Line Facilitators should be requested to mainstream outcomes in the GDC

In short, the WSIS framework should evolve not by expanding in size or scope, but by becoming more coherent, more connected to development priorities, and more inclusive of grounded expertise. This will strengthen its ability to support countries in shaping their digital futures with confidence and continuity.

7. Do you have any **other** comments? *

We thank the co-facilitators for the transparent and inclusive approach taken throughout the WSIS+20 preparatory process, particularly through the consultative sessions held at IGF 2025. This open engagement is a vital expression of the WSIS spirit and has helped foster a sense of shared responsibility for the future of the Information Society.

As the review process advances, we encourage the continued involvement of the full diversity of the multistakeholder community, including governments, civil society, the private sector, and especially the technical and academic communities, whose contributions are essential to the Internet's functionality, resilience, and adaptability.

The WSIS+20 review is not a moment to reinterpret past consensus, but rather to reaffirm and build upon it. In particular, it should:

- Embrace a development-first orientation that prioritizes connectivity, local empowerment, and institutional coherence.
- Recognize the enduring relevance of inclusive, distributed, and collaborative governance.
- Reinforce the continuity of institutions that have emerged from the WSIS process, ensuring their stability and alignment with evolving development needs.

We stand ready to support an outcome that is forward-looking, development-oriented, and grounded in operational realities that positions the WSIS framework to serve the next generation of users, communities, and nations entering the digital age.

8. Who is **submitting** this input? *

Kindly provide the name of the person submitting this input, as well as the associated country, organization, stakeholder type, and relevant contact information

Nick Ashton-Hart, Senior Director, Digital Economy Policy, APCO, USA, Private Sector

9. Please provide your **e-mail** address: *

Please enter an email