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

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)+20 High-Level Event has reaffirmed the global community's commitment to building a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society, fully aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For South Asia, where the digital divide remains significant and the potential for digital transformation is immense, the following achievements should guide future policy and action:

Reaffirmed Commitment to Universal and Meaningful Connectivity
WSIS+20 renewed the commitment to connect the unconnected through affordable, resilient, and inclusive digital infrastructure, with special attention to remote, rural, and underserved communities. This is vital for South Asia, where large populations still lack affordable access to quality internet and digital services.

Prioritisation of Digital Inclusion, Human Rights, and Online Safety
The WSIS+20 outcome emphasizes safeguarding fundamental rights online, including privacy, data protection, freedom of expression, and the fight against misinformation. Importantly, it also recognizes the need to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) and promote safe online spaces for women, children, and marginalized groups — a critical priority for South Asia's diverse societies.

Strengthening Multistakeholder Governance and Community Empowerment
The Summit reaffirmed that inclusive, transparent, and collaborative governance remains central to the WSIS vision. It recognizes the vital role of civil society, independent media, academia, and grassroots communities in shaping digital policy and practice. This aligns with South Asia's strong traditions of community radio, local media, and people-centred ICT initiatives that bridge last-mile gaps.

Advances in Digital Skills, Capacity Building, and Local Content
WSIS+20 highlighted the need for universal digital literacy and lifelong learning opportunities, ensuring all people have the skills to benefit from and shape the digital economy. It also stressed the creation and promotion of diverse, locally relevant content in multiple languages. These efforts are crucial for empowering South Asia's young and dynamic population, fostering jobs, entrepreneurship, and informed societies.

Addressing Emerging Technologies with Ethical and Inclusive Approaches
Recognizing the rapid growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies, WSIS+20 called for frameworks that ensure these tools are developed and used responsibly, ethically, and inclusively. For South Asia, this presents an opportunity to localize global AI principles and prevent new digital inequalities, while maximizing technology's benefits for sustainable development.

Commitment to Sustainable Financing and Regional Cooperation
The Summit underlined the need for innovative and sustainable financing mechanisms to support connectivity, digital inclusion, and capacity building in low- and middle-income countries. For South Asia, enhanced regional partnerships, South-South cooperation, and access to global resources will be critical to achieving WSIS and SDG goals together.

Strengthened Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability
Finally, WSIS+20 stressed the importance of reliable, disaggregated data to measure progress, address gaps, and ensure accountability. This aligns with South Asia's need for robust, evidence-based policymaking to close gender, geographic, and socio-economic divides.
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Conclusion
South Asia must leverage the renewed WSIS+20 momentum to accelerate inclusive digital transformation, empower communities, protect human rights online, and ensure that no one is left behind in the evolving Information Society.

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? *

The WSIS+20 process has reaffirmed global commitment to an inclusive, people-centred Information Society aligned with the SDGs. However, persistent and emerging challenges threaten to slow or reverse progress if not urgently addressed. For South Asia, these challenges require immediate, coordinated responses:

Deep Digital Divides:
Millions remain unconnected or poorly connected due to poverty, rural-urban gaps, gender inequality, and barriers for marginalized communities. High costs of devices, data, and access continue to limit meaningful connectivity for many households.

Gaps in Infrastructure and Affordability:
Inadequate and unreliable digital infrastructure, including broadband networks and electricity, especially in remote and disaster-prone areas, constrain universal service goals. Many communities lack affordable options or community-led solutions that reach the last mile.

Low Digital Skills and Literacy:
Large segments of the population lack basic digital literacy, let alone advanced skills for the evolving digital economy. This limits employability, entrepreneurship, and full participation, especially among women, youth, older people, and rural communities.

Human Rights, Trust, and Safety Risks:
Digital expansion brings rising concerns about online privacy, misuse of personal data, surveillance, misinformation, hate speech, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). Weak data protection frameworks and limited digital rights safeguards undermine trust.

Weak Multistakeholder Engagement:
Despite WSIS commitments, decision-making often remains top-down, with limited opportunities for civil society, grassroots media, youth, women, and local communities to shape policies and hold stakeholders accountable.

Ethical and Governance Challenges of Emerging Technologies:
The rapid adoption of AI and other emerging technologies poses new ethical, social, and legal questions. Without robust, context-specific governance and capacity, these tools risk deepening inequalities, amplifying bias, and eroding rights.

Funding and Sustainability Constraints:
Ambitious digital plans often lack sufficient, predictable funding. Grassroots initiatives, community networks, local content creators, and independent media struggle for resources. There is a need for innovative, sustainable financing models that prioritize inclusion.

Limited Regional Cooperation:
South Asia shares common connectivity and inclusion challenges but underuses opportunities for regional partnerships, cross-border learning, and shared solutions. Regional mechanisms to address gaps collectively are still emerging.

Insufficient Monitoring and Data:
Many countries lack reliable, timely, disaggregated data to track progress on connectivity, skills, content diversity, and rights. This hampers evidence-based policymaking and weakens accountability for achieving WSIS goals.
Conclusion
Addressing these persistent and emerging challenges is critical to realizing WSIS+20 commitments and ensuring digital transformation contributes to inclusive, resilient, and rights-based development in South Asia. Bridging divides, strengthening human rights and online safety, empowering communities, building skills, and promoting regional cooperation must remain top priorities to leave no one behind in the evolving Information Society.

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 fully realize the WSIS+20 vision of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society aligned with the SDGs, urgent and coordinated actions are needed to address persistent gaps and leverage emerging opportunities. For South Asia, the following priorities should guide national and regional efforts:

Ensure Universal and Meaningful Connectivity
Expand affordable, reliable internet access to all, with a focus on last-mile solutions for rural, remote and underserved communities. Support diverse infrastructure models, including community networks, local access points, and public Wi-Fi, to close remaining coverage gaps.

Make Access Affordable and Inclusive
Implement policies to reduce the cost of devices, data and digital services, especially for low-income and marginalized groups. Explore targeted subsidies, social tariffs, and innovative funding mechanisms to ensure no one is left offline.

Bridge the Gender and Social Digital Divide
Design and enforce policies that promote gender equality in digital access, skills, and leadership. Tackle socio-cultural barriers, support safe online spaces for women and girls, and empower marginalized communities, including persons with disabilities and minorities.

Build Digital Skills for All
Invest in universal digital literacy and advanced skills training, with a focus on youth, women, informal workers and rural populations. Promote lifelong learning to prepare communities for the digital economy and emerging technologies such as AI.

Protect Human Rights Online
Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks for privacy, data protection and freedom of expression. Combat online harms including misinformation, hate speech and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Promote digital safety awareness and accessible redress mechanisms.

Foster Local Content and Languages
Encourage the creation and distribution of diverse local content in multiple languages to make the digital space relevant and empowering for all communities. Support independent media, community broadcasters and local innovators.

Promote Responsible and Inclusive AI
Develop context-sensitive policies and ethical guidelines for Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies to ensure they are safe, fair, transparent and free from bias. Build regional capacity for AI research and innovation that addresses local challenges.

Strengthen Multistakeholder Governance
Ensure civil society, grassroots groups, academia, independent media and marginalized voices have a meaningful seat at the table in digital policy development and implementation. Encourage open dialogue and collaboration across sectors.

Mobilize Sustainable Financing
Expand innovative and sustainable funding for connectivity, community networks, skills programmes, local content and safe online spaces. Leverage public-private partnerships, regional cooperation and South-South collaboration to unlock resources.

Enhance Regional Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing
Promote stronger regional partnerships to share good practices, develop common frameworks for emerging issues like AI and cybersecurity, and address cross-border challenges together. Strengthen South Asia's collective voice in global digital governance forums.

Improve Monitoring and Accountability
Invest in robust, disaggregated data systems to track progress on connectivity, affordability, digital skills, content diversity and online rights. Use this evidence to inform policies, address gaps and hold all stakeholders accountable for commitments.

Conclusion
By acting boldly on these priorities, South Asia can harness digital transformation to reduce inequalities, advance human rights, and create resilient, inclusive and knowledge-driven societies in line with the WSIS+20 vision — leaving no one behind in the evolving Information Society.

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

To fully align the WSIS+20 vision with the priorities and realities of South Asia, it is essential to integrate additional themes that respond to the region's complex digital landscape, rapid socio-economic shifts, and emerging technological trends. The following areas merit explicit attention in the Elements Paper:

Climate Resilience and Green ICTs
South Asia is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change. The Elements Paper should emphasize the role of ICTs in climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, early warning systems, and green technology solutions. Promoting climate-smart digital infrastructure and energy-efficient technologies must be a core priority.

Digital Rights and Civic Space
While human rights online are part of WSIS commitments, the Elements Paper should stress safeguarding civic space and freedom of expression in digital environments. With shrinking offline civic space in some countries, protecting digital freedoms, privacy, and rights to organize and mobilize online is vital.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)
Given the high rates of gender-based violence online in South Asia, explicit reference to TFGBV prevention, response, and survivor-centred support should be strengthened. The Elements Paper should call for national policies, helplines, reporting mechanisms, and capacity building to tackle this growing threat.

Inclusion of Informal Workers and the Gig Economy
Millions in South Asia depend on informal and gig work. The Elements Paper should recognize the rights, protections, and fair digital integration of informal workers, including access to platforms, social protections, and skills to adapt to digital transitions.

Digital Health and Telemedicine
COVID-19 highlighted the importance of digital health. The Paper should prioritize strengthening e-health systems, affordable telemedicine, and data privacy in health technologies. This can expand access to quality healthcare for remote and underserved communities.

Youth Leadership in Digital Transformation
Given South Asia's young population, the Elements Paper should amplify youth voices in digital policy design and implementation. It should encourage investment in youth digital innovation, entrepreneurship, and leadership networks to shape a more equitable digital future.

Data Sovereignty and Cross-Border Data Flows
Rapid digitalization raises concerns about data governance and sovereignty. The Elements Paper should encourage fair frameworks for cross-border data flows, data protection, and locally relevant data policies that balance economic growth with individual rights.

Resilient Community Media Ecosystems
Pluralistic, independent, and community-led media are critical to informed societies. The Paper should acknowledge the vital role of community radio, local broadcasters, and grassroots ICT hubs in digital inclusion, crisis response, and local content creation.

Digital Peace and Security
South Asia's unique geopolitical context calls for cooperative regional frameworks to address cybersecurity threats, misinformation, and digital conflict risks. The Elements Paper should include peaceful, rights-based cybersecurity cooperation and capacity building.

Bridging the Language Divide
Millions still face barriers due to lack of content and services in local languages. The Paper should highlight local language technology, translation tools, and linguistic diversity to make the Information Society accessible to all.

Accessible ICTs for Persons with Disabilities
The Elements Paper should reinforce commitments to ensure all digital services, platforms, and content are accessible to persons with disabilities, supported by inclusive design, capacity building, and enforceable standards.

Sustainable Financing for Community-Led Innovation
Special attention should be given to innovative financing for community networks, grassroots connectivity solutions, digital literacy initiatives, and local startups — ensuring sustainability

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

We welcome the WSIS+20 Review Elements Paper as a vital milestone for renewing global commitment to a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society. We appreciate its clear alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its reaffirmation of core WSIS principles. However, to ensure the Paper responds fully to today's realities and emerging trends, we wish to offer the following comments and suggestions:

Stronger Emphasis on Last-Mile Connectivity and Affordability
The Paper rightly highlights universal connectivity but should more clearly recognize the critical gaps that remain in remote, rural and marginalized communities. Greater focus on community networks, alternative access models and practical solutions to make devices and data affordable is essential for meaningful universal access in South Asia.

Addressing the Gender Digital Divide and TFGBV
While gender inclusion is mentioned, the Paper should expand its focus on the gender digital divide by explicitly addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). Strengthening references to safe digital spaces, survivor-centred support systems and national mechanisms to combat online abuse is vital.

Climate Resilience and Green ICTs
The Review Elements Paper would benefit from clearer language on the role of ICTs in addressing climate change, building resilience and promoting green technologies. Given South Asia's climate vulnerabilities, this link must be explicit to ensure ICT strategies contribute to climate action.

Local Content, Languages and Cultural Diversity
The Paper could better highlight the importance of promoting local content in diverse languages to ensure digital inclusion for linguistically and culturally diverse communities. This is especially relevant for South Asia's vast multilingual population.

Civic Space and Digital Rights
We encourage a stronger reference to protecting civic space online, upholding freedom of expression, and preventing misuse of surveillance technologies. Safeguarding digital human rights must remain a core principle of the WSIS vision.

Youth and Informal Workers
More explicit recognition of youth leadership in shaping the Information Society and the integration of informal and gig economy workers into digital strategies will help align WSIS+20 outcomes with South Asia's demographic and labour realities.

Ethical and Inclusive AI
The Paper should strengthen its focus on emerging technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence. It should emphasize the need for robust, inclusive and ethical governance frameworks to ensure AI reduces — rather than reinforces — inequalities.

Financing for Community-Led Innovation
We recommend clearer commitments to innovative and sustainable financing for community networks, grassroots connectivity initiatives, local media and capacity-building programmes that address real barriers at the local level.

Regional Cooperation
The Paper should encourage stronger regional partnerships and South-South collaboration to address shared challenges such as cybersecurity, misinformation, cross-border data flows and digital skills development.

Data and Accountability
Finally, we welcome the focus on monitoring but urge stronger language on the need for disaggregated, up-to-date data to track progress and close gaps in gender, geography, disability and income.

Conclusion
In summary, we commend the Paper's reaffirmation of WSIS principles and its alignment with the SDGs. By more strongly addressing these additional priorities — last-mile inclusion, gender equality, climate resilience, local content, youth leadership, digital rights, responsible AI and sustainable financing — the WSIS+20 process can better ensure that digital transformation truly leaves no one behind in South Asia and beyond.

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

Ensure the WSIS+20 process remains fit for purpose and delivers on its promise of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, it is important to modernize, connect and strengthen its key mechanisms — the Action Lines, Internet Governance Forum (IGF), WSIS Forum and the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS). The following suggestions aim to enhance their relevance, impact and inclusivity:

Make WSIS Action Lines More Responsive to Emerging Trends
• Update the Action Lines to explicitly integrate issues such as Artificial Intelligence, ethical and inclusive AI governance, digital sustainability and green ICTs.
• Include cross-cutting themes like digital trust, online safety, data protection and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).
• Ensure Action Lines promote local solutions — including community networks, local content and inclusive digital literacy — that address real barriers at national and local levels.

Strengthen Regional Implementation and Adaptation
• Develop practical regional Action Line roadmaps so countries can localize priorities to their specific contexts.
• Facilitate South-South and intra-regional cooperation to share lessons, pool resources and tackle cross-border challenges such as cybersecurity, misinformation and cross-border data flows.

Enhance the IGF's Impact and Inclusivity
• Expand efforts to ensure meaningful participation from underrepresented groups — grassroots organisations, community media, youth, women, persons with disabilities and indigenous communities.
• Promote actionable outputs by linking IGF dialogues more directly to policy outcomes and WSIS Action Lines.
• Support national and regional IGFs with funding and capacity building so they become stronger bridges between global dialogue and local action.

Reinforce the WSIS Forum as a Platform for Grassroots Voices
• Make the WSIS Forum more accessible by supporting digital and hybrid participation for communities with limited connectivity.
• Dedicate spaces to highlight community-led innovation, youth-driven solutions and local stories from regions like South Asia.
• Strengthen outcome documents to include clear, time-bound recommendations that can inform national policies.

Strengthen the Role of UNGIS
• Revitalize UNGIS as an effective coordinating body to ensure WSIS implementation remains aligned with the SDGs, the Global Digital Compact and the UN's broader digital cooperation agenda.
• Encourage UNGIS to support better data collection and reporting to monitor progress with disaggregated indicators (by gender, location, income, disability).
• Facilitate joint UN support for countries to develop integrated digital inclusion strategies that connect WSIS Action Lines with practical SDG progress.

Improve Monitoring and Accountability
• Develop simple, open tools for countries and communities to track progress on WSIS commitments.
• Encourage voluntary peer learning and country-level reviews to exchange good practices and address implementation gaps.
• Support regular reporting that is participatory and inclusive of civil society perspectives.

Mobilize Sustainable Funding
• Encourage partnerships with development banks, private sector and donors to fund national and local WSIS activities, especially for last-mile connectivity, local media and community networks.
• Explore innovative funding like Social Obligation Funds to channel resources into Action Line priorities.

Connect the WSIS+20 Framework with Other Global Agendas
• Actively link WSIS outcomes to the Global Digital Compact, SDG mid-term reviews, and processes like the Summit of the Future, ensuring digital transformation remains a central development priority.
• Promote coherence and synergy across the WSIS process, IGF outcomes and other UN digital frameworks to avoid duplication and maximize impact.

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

At the outset, after two decades of implementing the WSIS Action Lines, we recognise the tremendous opportunities enabled by widespread connectivity, enhanced mobility, more user-friendly interfaces, and emerging transaction channels. These advancements motivate us to expand public services beyond traditional online and mobile platforms and to explore new ways to reach everyone.

However, it is deeply concerning that a significant new dimension of the digital divide is emerging alongside this progress. Despite our growing access to information and knowledge, this divide appears to be widening daily rather than narrowing. It is critical that we acknowledge this challenge honestly and work together to find effective solutions so that everyone, especially the underserved, can benefit fully from the digital age.

Today, access to information and knowledge has become highly commercialised and is increasingly dominated by the corporate sector, as we have observed over the past 20 years. This raises an important question: where are the voices of the underserved communities in this space? Those voices must be heard, amplified and integrated into decision-making. It is regrettable that despite two decades of collaboration with the private sector, the essential WSIS objectives of empowering people through equitable access to information and knowledge remain far from fully realised, as envisioned in the Geneva Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda for Action.

There is now an urgent opportunity to enhance the WSIS Forum to better tackle both longstanding gaps and new challenges. A strengthened WSIS Forum should help generate practical solutions, support localisation, and enable stronger engagement with the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) at the country level.

At present, there is a clear disconnect between the UN RC offices and the WSIS and IGF processes at the national level. Bridging this gap is crucial for stronger collaboration, better coordination and greater impact, ensuring that global commitments translate into local action and tangible benefits for communities.

What is urgently needed is a permanent, reinforced and sustainably funded WSIS and IGF Secretariat that can operate effectively at both the global and national levels. This should be supported through action in three priority areas:

Develop Localised Action Plans: Align global WSIS commitments with national priorities through locally relevant action plans. Establish a centralised reporting system within the UN to track and share progress transparently.

Capacity Building and Awareness: Expand ICT education and digital skills training for all, especially underserved groups. Promote the use of ICTs for inclusive development and run widespread awareness campaigns on the benefits of an inclusive information and knowledge society.

Enable Multi-Stakeholder Engagement: Establish and maintain multi-stakeholder platforms that encourage regular consultation, share progress, and foster innovation and collaboration among governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, local communities and the media.

In conclusion, we must act boldly to ensure that the WSIS vision of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society becomes reality for all — not just for those who can afford it. Now is the time to close the gaps, localise the global commitments and build resilient systems that truly leave no one behind.

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

AHM Bazlur Rahman | Chief Executive Officer | Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication |

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

Please enter an email