

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

WSIS has played a key role in shaping how digital technologies are discussed and developed globally, particularly by encouraging a multistakeholder approach that includes governments, civil society, the private sector, and others. One of its most visible outcomes was the creation of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which continues to provide an open platform for dialogue on internet-related policy issues. Importantly, the IGF with its national, regional and youth initiatives and intersessional works has helped institutionalize multistakeholderism by allowing diverse stakeholders to come together, share their perspectives, and contribute to policy discussions in a collaborative rather than top-down manner.

WSIS has been instrumental in embedding ICTs into mainstream development planning by connecting them to wider priorities such as education, healthcare, gender equality, and poverty reduction, contributing to their integration in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the years, Significant progress has been made in global internet connectivity with broadband infrastructure expanding to connect remote and under served regions. Today nearly 70% of the world is connected, the digital economy is growing.

WSIS has fostered digital cooperation, advanced capacity-building in developing regions, and provided a platform for countries from the Global South and least-represented regions to engage meaningfully in global digital dialogues.

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 articulated a broad and inclusive vision for digital development, its implementation over the past two decades has been uneven. Developed countries have made significant progress in advancing digital infrastructure, innovation, and governance, but many countries in the Global South continue to face substantial barriers. These include limited access to digital infrastructure, insufficient financial and technical resources, and weak institutional capacity to formulate and implement effective digital policies. This divergence underscores the urgent need for targeted international support, context-sensitive implementation timelines, and mechanisms that enable equitable participation in the digital transformation process.

The rapid pace of technological advancement over the last five to six years has further complicated this landscape. Innovations such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, facial recognition, and the Internet of Things have emerged and scaled faster than national and international policy frameworks can adapt. This has led to growing regulatory gaps, fragmented governance approaches, and uneven application of safeguards meant to protect users' rights. In many jurisdictions, legal and policy frameworks have not kept pace with these changes, leaving individuals and communities vulnerable to misuse, exploitation, and exclusion.

A particularly pressing concern is the growing disconnect between WSIS's original commitment to a rights-based approach and the realities of contemporary tech development. Emerging technologies are increasingly deployed without adequate protections for privacy, transparency, fairness, or accountability. Tools like facial recognition, algorithmic surveillance, and generative AI are often rolled out in ways that infringe on civil liberties and deepen societal biases. In several instances, digital expansion has occurred at the cost of fundamental rights, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations.

The digital divide also remains a persistent and evolving challenge. As of today, 2.6 billion people remain unconnected to the internet, the majority of whom are from the Global South. But connectivity alone is not the full picture. Many communities still lack meaningful, affordable, and safe access. Gender-based digital disparities, rural-urban connectivity gaps, and language barriers continue to limit access to opportunities and services. Additionally, WSIS has not yet secured robust public financing commitments from the global community to support the development of digital public infrastructure and connectivity solutions in under-resourced regions.

Alongside the digital divide is the emergence of a growing ecological divide. The rapid expansion of the digital economy is energy-intensive and resource-heavy, placing high environmental burdens on the planet. E-waste, rising data center emissions, and extractive supply chains for hardware components disproportionately affect countries in the Global South, which often host the production and disposal cycles of the digital ecosystem. These impacts exacerbate existing environmental vulnerabilities and threaten to further marginalize already disadvantaged populations.

The next phase of WSIS must respond to these interlinked challenges with urgency and coherence. Digital development must not only be inclusive but also rights-respecting and ecologically sustainable. This requires renewed international cooperation to support developing countries through funding, capacity building, and technology transfer. Stronger mechanisms are needed to ensure that digital governance frameworks are aligned with international human rights standards and grounded in transparency and accountability.

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 vision of a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society, the international community must recognize that closing both the digital and ecological divides is not a peripheral concern but a global imperative. The growing disparities in access to digital infrastructure, digital literacy, and meaningful connectivity, compounded by environmental degradation and the unequal impacts of climate change, threaten to undermine inclusive digital development and the broader WSIS goals. Developing countries, particularly those in the Global South, continue to face significant barriers to digital inclusion. These include high costs of connectivity, lack of infrastructure, limited digital skills, and minimal participation in global standard-setting and governance processes. WSIS must therefore prioritize sustained financial, technical, and institutional support for developing countries. This includes capacity building, technology transfer, and the creation of enabling environments that allow for sovereign digital development aligned with human rights and environmental sustainability.

The protection of fundamental rights, including privacy, freedom of expression, and access to information, must remain a central component of WSIS implementation. At the same time, it is critical to ensure that digital technologies are governed ethically, with transparency, accountability, and the public interest at the center. This is especially important in the current context, where the proliferation of artificial intelligence, big data systems, and automated decision-making tools risks entrenching existing inequalities and introducing new forms of exclusion. To ensure that digital development remains inclusive, accountable, and resilient in the face of rapid technological change, WSIS must continue to uphold and strengthen the multistakeholder model. Meaningful participation from civil society, governments, the private sector, technical communities, academia, and marginalized voices is essential. It is only through inclusive dialogue that we can foster digital policies and systems that reflect diverse needs, promote trust, and ensure shared ownership of the digital future.

In this context, the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) needs to be renewed and strengthened. The IGF serves a unique function in the global internet governance ecosystem by enabling inclusive, open, and non-binding dialogue across all stakeholder groups. Its intersessional work, including Dynamic Coalitions, Best Practice Forums, and Policy Networks, plays a vital role in generating knowledge, building consensus, and bridging gaps between global and local digital policy discussions. These processes must be better resourced and integrated into broader policy and implementation frameworks so they can more effectively contribute to the WSIS Action Lines and global development agendas. In addition to strengthening global dialogue, the WSIS process must evolve at national and sub-national levels. The annual WSIS Forum, while a critical convening space, should be complemented by more localized discussions that reflect regional and national priorities. These localized engagements can help identify grassroots challenges, enable more inclusive participation from underrepresented communities, and foster solutions that are responsive to local realities. A distributed WSIS model that connects local, regional, and global forums would allow for more dynamic and context-sensitive policy development.

Looking ahead to WSIS+20 and beyond, the reaffirmation of WSIS commitments must be accompanied by a renewed global compact. This compact should be grounded in digital solidarity, equity, and sustainability. It should align digital transformation with the broader goals of human development, environmental justice, and the universal realization of rights for all.

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

No comments

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

The Elements Paper should more accurately reflect the WSIS+10 outcomes and the principles articulated in the Global Digital Compact (GDC), especially in relation to inclusive and participatory digital governance. A key concern is the incongruence between the current narrow framing of multistakeholder governance in paragraph 59 and the more expansive, inclusive approach defined in the original Tunis Agenda. The Tunis Agenda emphasized not only the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholder groups but also their shared participation in decision-making processes. This broader framing is vital to upholding democratic, equitable, and accountable digital governance. The current formulation in paragraph 59 risks narrowing the scope of participation and overlooking the original WSIS vision of shared ownership in shaping the digital future.

Strengthening the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) must be a priority if WSIS is to remain relevant and responsive in the coming decade. The IGF has played a crucial role as a global multistakeholder space for dialogue, exchange, and consensus-building. However, without long-term institutional certainty and adequate sustainable funding, the IGF cannot fulfill its full potential. Greater integration of IGF outputs into policymaking, support for intersessional work, and stronger links with national and regional IGFs will be key to making the IGF a more effective mechanism for inclusive digital cooperation. It should remain central to the implementation of WSIS Action Lines and the GDC's participatory aspirations.

The Elements Paper must also contain stronger, more explicit human rights language. Commitments to privacy, freedom of expression, and access to information should be grounded in clear references to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The paper should emphasize protections for those most at risk in digital spaces, including women, children, and journalists, and respond to the rise of digital harms such as surveillance, online harassment, and censorship.

The implementation of the GDC should be aligned with the WSIS framework through a coherent joint roadmap. This would help avoid duplicative structures and conflicting mandates, and ensure more efficient use of resources. Such alignment would also strengthen accountability and coherence in digital policy across global, regional, and national levels.

Despite improvements in global connectivity, stark disparities in access and digital capacity remain. Many in the Global South still lack meaningful connectivity, affordable access, and digital literacy. Financing models must shift to prioritize inclusive infrastructure and the provision of public digital goods, especially in under-resourced regions. Closing the digital divide requires not only technical solutions but political will and financial solidarity.

In governing emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and large-scale data systems, rights-based and inclusive frameworks are essential. Rapid technological innovation has often outpaced policy development, leaving governance gaps and exposing communities to unchecked harms. These risks are compounded by the environmental costs of the digital economy. The growing carbon footprint of AI, increasing energy demands of data infrastructure, and global e-waste flows disproportionately affect developing countries, which often bear the ecological burdens of digital growth without commensurate benefits.

Rather than adopting restrictive or punitive approaches, the WSIS+20 process should aim for a constructive, forward-looking reaffirmation of digital rights, environmental sustainability, and equitable cooperation. This is an opportunity to renew global consensus around a digital future that is inclusive, rights-respecting, and sustainable for all.

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

No comments

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

No

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

Shradhanjali Sarma, Legal Consultant, CCAOI, India, Civil Society, shradhanjali@ccaoi.in

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

Please enter an email