

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

The biggest success of WSIS has to be the establishment of its core vision, a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society. This core principle has provided framing for the global discourse around digital transformation to be centred around human progress and empowerment, rather than technology alone. Perhaps the most tangible outcome of this was the idea of the multistakeholder model for cooperation, which has also been rightly recognized as critical to the construction of an inclusive digital future, not least because of the importance of handling complex topics that require a comprehensive outlook that can only be offered by stakeholders from different streams of society. This has been formally captured by the IGF, which has been set up to be the main venue for these important discussions. WSIS also highlighted the importance of human rights as a key part of the digital age and established the critical principle that rights must be protected online and offline. As a combination, these three things - a guiding vision, a model for cooperation and digital rights-based approach - are the essential ingredients for future progress which we must unite behind and endorse within the Zero Draft.

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 primary challenge is the persistent digital divide - but no longer framed solely in terms of connectivity, but also in terms of access to education, affordances, and cultural inclusion. Current discussions about the digital divide need to recognize its increased complexity and highlight the emerging concerns regarding the need to be able to access and use emerging digitally-used services that are meaningfully affordable, culturally-aware and safe. Should the information divide become entrenched, circling back to a world where the existing social and economic divides deepen, is possible, particularly in fragile states and developing countries where there is a relative lack of infrastructure, lack of technical skills and lack of financial resources to be able to catch up. A second parallel challenge for everyone, regardless of previous access and affordability levels, is the impending threat of Internet fragmentation and consolidation, created by various competing governance models that undermine the nature and essence of a global, interoperable, open Internet. Addressing issues about governance deficits around emerging technologies like AI is a third challenge, and the potential risks posed to human rights, information integrity and job security, with developing nations particularly susceptible to their negative uptake, is a clear example of a public interest in the Global South. Finally, securing the online space from cybercrime, harassment and disinformation remains a gargantuan policy problem that undermines public trust and limits the ability of people to realize the full promise of the WSIS vision.

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? *

As we look toward the post-2030 agenda, three priorities need to be in place. We need to take concrete measures to achieve universal, meaningful, and affordable access as an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to align the WSIS and SDG accountability with unambiguous centrality. Digital governance must be firmly based in international human rights measures that protect us from surveillance, censorship, and algorithmic bias. Additionally, it is essential to emphasize care for fragile and developing countries, and this emphasis must go beyond talk in the form of policy rhetoric, and to consideration of financial means of support, capacity building in purposeful ways for policymakers and civil society, and technology transfer to address the growing AI divide, which will no doubt be the next fundamental challenge facing the Global South. Lastly, we must connect with the urgent need to examine the environmental impacts of the digital ecosystem, by embedding circular economy definitions and principles of sustainability standards in every digital policy. A sustainable digital future is a necessary condition for a sustainable planet, and we can no longer treat this as secondary.

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

The paper needs to also tackle the serious threat that "digital sovereignty" would impact the interoperable Internet. Governments will likely abuse this term and try to control the internet even more. Critical focus should be put on preventing any local policies to undermine the decentralized architecture of the Internet. Another area that I think should get more attention is the web3 decentralized technologies (notably blockchain and distributed networks) to establish trust, foster press freedom and protect human rights as an additional layer embedded on the decentralized internet. Decentralized technologies could provide an architectural balance to the centralization used to facilitate surveillance and censorship. The role of these technologies in developing a more resilient and rights-respecting information society is worthy of specific mention as a forward-looking solution to many issues outlined. Finally, and as I mention in my paper on blockchain and AI, there should always be a focus on research and its role in providing clues as to the future integration of emerging tools so they could complement and enforce each other in a way that would embolden human rights.

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

Certainly, there are many paragraphs that could be improved. The text on human rights acknowledges that ICT poses new challenges, but deserves more specificity on threats such as state-sponsored internet shut downs and the targeting of civil society through spyware, as they undermine the WSIS vision. Contributions to the text on AI, while worth mentioning the concentration of development of AI, should instead have more pointed language. I think it's worth framing this risk as "data colonialism." We need to reemphasize the need for countries to develop their own culturally-aware AI ecosystems based on local data and for local needs, and ensure that AI is providing the development that countries deem important. Otherwise, we risk enhancing the digital superiority of the West by impacting the expected wide use of GenAI in the Global South. Finally, I think that the text on the IGF could be strengthened by mentioning that while discussion is important, we should be orienting toward how the IGF's recommendations could be integrated into policy to make meaningful change at the national and international levels in developing countries that are looking for policy guidance.

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

To modernize and reinforce the WSIS framework, the mission of the IGF should be revamped and revitalized. Instead of being a "discussion forum," the IGF should be producing tangible outputs such as policy best practices and normative recommendations that can also feed into the other actual UN processes and products such as the Global Digital Compact (GDC). Meaningful and funded participation from developing country stakeholders needs to be assured and enhanced. In the same way, the WSIS Action Lines need an update with an eye to the future by explicitly bringing to the forefront the current challenges and goals of AI governance, environmental sustainability of ICTs, and countering disinformation. The coordination and cooperation role of UNGIS needs to also be strengthened to help ensure coherence and avoid duplication of effort with the ongoing WSIS follow-up, implementation of the GDC, and new UN initiatives on AI among other things. It is essential to streamline these processes, especially with fragile states that lack the bandwidth to participate in a fragmented governance landscape.

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

I think the AI revolution that we are witnessing cannot be overstated. We need to energize the commitment and accountability process in what the tech giants leading this space. The post-2025 agenda must focus on fair post-AI digital transitions that include marginalized populations, upholds basic human rights and protection and positively engages fragile states in their work toward the SDGs. The consequences of not taking action now doesn't just reflect the same digital divides we see today; it provides space for new and deeper inequalities that ultimately represent a future with two worlds and will damage the entire 2030 Agenda to achieve the SDGs.

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

Walid Al-Saqaf, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Academia, Doha - Qatar

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

Please enter an email