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

The WSIS provided a framework for focused national, regional and international action on 'the Information Society" and digital development. The Geneva outcome documents established eleven Action Lines representing aspects of digital development to be pursued through multistakeholder cooperation and thereby both established and linked key themes of internet governance, digital technology development, sustainable development (including linking with the Sustainable Development Goals) and multistakeholder cooperation at the UN. Action lines relating to increasing access to the internet and to internet-enabled services helped to galvanise resourcing for ICT development, increase access to universal, ubiquitous, equitable and affordable access to ICT infrastructure and services and to support access to capacity building relating to the governance and infrastructural frameworks (e.g. data protection and cybersecurity).

One of the most important achievements of the WSIS is the establishment of the Internet Governance Forum, including the creation of national, regional and international IGFs. These have provided a significant and unique forum for multistakeholder and inclusive dialogue on a wide range of issues relating to ICTs including human rights, access to the internet, online and media technologies; access to digitally enabled public services; and the continued and identification of issues relating to internet governance and digital technologies. As policy issues relating to the internet and digital technologies become more complex, this ability of the IGF to convene and focus multistakeholder cooperation and action is of ever more increased significance.

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? *

There are many intersecting challenges relating to the achievement of the WSIS outcomes to date that should be addressed:

Rapid technological change vs. slow policy response: The fast-moving pace of digital technology development results in challenges in developing and implementing suitable and robust policy and regulatory frameworks: for example, most recently, the development of artificial intelligence, quantum computing, neurotechnologies and biometrics. There is often a limited capacity of policymakers to understand the impact of these technologies on human rights and a lack of inclusive policymaking that adequately includes stakeholders in the development and implementation of policies and standards to govern digital technologies.

The consolidation of digital power: while the internet's infrastructure is layered and was built as a decentralised technology, the political economy of the internet has resulted in a consolidation of economic power within a small number of large companies (e.g Microsoft, Amazon, Meta, Google and Apple) that provide most of the key services which internet users use all across the world. This means that the governance of new internet and digitally enabled technologies has resulted in reduced competition and innovation, barriers to entry for smaller firms or open-source alternatives and the exploitation of market power (e.g price manipulation, service domination and exploitation of data)- raising concerns about fair access, data exploitation, and the dominance of closed ecosystems.

Fragmentation of the internet and user experience in particular: the consolidation of the internet is developing alongside the increasing fragmentation of the internet for users. This challenge is acknowledged in the Global Digital Compact which, in paragraph 29(c) commits member states of the UN to "Promote international cooperation among all stakeholders to prevent, identify and address risks of fragmentation of the Internet in a timely manner (SDG16)' (GDC, Objective 3, art 29, (c)).". Fragmentation of the internet is complex but has the fundamental character of resulting in different experiences of the openness and security of the internet by internet users depending on where they live: this can be the result of a combination of intended and unintended consequences of actions including: digital divides, censorship, blocking of content and services, internet shutdowns, data localisation and zero-rated services. "Digital sovereignty" narratives are often utilised as the framing for policies that, whether inadvertently or otherwise, legitimise policies and practices that could exacerbate internet fragmentation, risk deepening inequalities and eroding an open, interoperable and secure internet.

Securitisation of digital governance and regulatory frameworks: this refers to the increasing trend that issues related to the governance of the internet and the use of digital technologies are framed and treated as matters of national security rather than in economic, social or technical terms. These justify disproportionate and extraordinary measures such as surveillance, censorship, and the use of law enforcement and even military powers to criminalise online expression, often targeting civil society actors and human rights defenders.

Persistent Digital Divides: digital divides persist alongside gaps in digital skills and mirror offline and broader societal inequalities and those that existed prior to the internet including relating to gender, rural and urban divides, educational and poverty divides and disability. For example, in relation to gender digital divides, women are fifteen percent less likely than men to own mobile phones in lower- and middle-income countries; the gap is wider in low-income countries and least developing countries.

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 achieve the WSIS vision, the Zero Draft should prioritise actions that advance digital governance rooted in human rights, equity, and public interest. Five critical priorities are:

Protect and strengthen the enabling environment for civil society. Civil society must be recognised as a key stakeholder in global digital governance. Across regions, civil society actors have played essential roles in shaping inclusive digital policies, supporting their implementation, and holding institutions accountable. They have served as watchdogs, elevated underrepresented voices in global forums, and championed a human rights-based approach to internet and platform governance. Through sustained research and monitoring, civil society also provides critical evidence to assess whether governments and platforms are upholding their commitments.

However, civil society worldwide is facing a rapidly deteriorating environment. Many organisations are operating under restrictive legal frameworks, are excluded from meaningful participation in digital policy processes, face declining funding, and suffer from negative societal narratives that delegitimise their work.

This reality is well-documented by the EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (EU SEE), a consortium of international CSOs and network members operating in 86 countries. EU SEE monitors shifts in the enabling environment and has identified a worrying trend: the increasing use of digital technologies to undermine civil society, often as an extension of broader repressive tactics. These include:

-Misuse of cybercrime laws to restrict expression or criminalise dissent;
-Harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders and media workers;
-Disinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting civil society;
-Defunding and other forms of resource suppression.

These patterns not only threaten civic actors, but they also undermine the integrity of digital governance itself. A strong enabling environment for civil society is not optional; it is a precondition for democratic, inclusive, and accountable digital transformation.

2. Institutionalise inclusive multistakeholder governance at all levels: Governments should strengthen platforms—like the IGF and national IGFs—that ensure civil society, academia, the technical community, and marginalised groups are engaged as co-creators of digital policies.

3. Ensure digital governance is anchored in human rights and sustainable development: WSIS must develop and strengthen norms and their implementation which are human-rights respecting and aligned with other relevant UN frameworks including the Global Digital Compact, the Pact for the Future and the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Protect a free, open, secure, and interoperable internet: Multilateral and multistakeholder cooperation is needed to resist growing fragmentation, surveillance overreach, and unjustified restrictions on access or content.

5. Address digital divides holistically: this includes not just expanding connectivity, but also improving affordability, digital literacy, content relevance, and institutional capacities—particularly for underserved and marginalised communities.

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

The WSIS+20 process should explicitly recognise the importance of a digital enabling environment for civil society as essential to achieving the WSIS vision. This includes acknowledging the key factors that make such an environment possible such as supportive legal frameworks, access to safe digital technologies, meaningful participation in policymaking, and sustainable resourcing.

The Zero Draft should also address the growing threats to this environment, including restrictive laws, digital surveillance, disinformation campaigns, and shrinking funding. These negative trends are undermining civil society's ability to contribute meaningfully to internet governance, weakening the multi-stakeholder model at the heart of WSIS.

A country's digital environment should enable civil society actors to participate securely and freely in both the offline and online environments. A truly enabling digital environment ensures that civil society actors:

-Can participate safely, freely, and meaningfully online;
-Are protected from online harassment, surveillance, and cybercrime misuse;
-Have legal frameworks that support their work and access to remedy;
-Enjoy equitable access to digital tools, infrastructure, and skills.

The WSIS+20 review should commit to the establishment of a permanent IGF mandate, supported by adequate resourcing and more transparent and accessible procedures. A permanent IGF would provide a long-term, stable forum for discussion of digital policy topics in an inclusive and multistakeholder manner. As noted in the cross-community stakeholder statement: "in practical terms, it is essential to look for ways to build on the current model of financing the IGF through voluntary contributions, ensuring a more predictable financial basis for the future evolution and sustainability of the IGF ecosystem." (From the IGF's Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) "Vision of the IGF beyond 2024", released in late 2024).

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

Enabling environment (paras 36–38):

The section on the enabling environment should include reference to civil society and to the factors related to the digital enabling environment referred to in reference to question 4 above. It should recognise the importance of the multistakeholder approach to internet governance and the need to protect a digital enabling environment for civil society to exercise its roles within internet governance and in the pursuit of the WSIS vision. The section should also make explicit that civil society must be included not only as beneficiaries but as equal partners in policy design, implementation, and oversight related to digital policy. Protection of civil society's operational environment online must be part of the enabling environment, including through safeguards from state or corporate overreach.

Human Rights and Ethical Dimensions (paras 43–50): We believe this section could be strengthened by referring to agreed human rights texts that inform the governance of digital technologies including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It should also recognise the formal role of the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner which has a deep expertise in the evolution and adaption of the international human rights framework in the digital age.

IGF (paras 57–64): We recommend that the Zero Draft call for the IGF to be established as a permanent UN mechanism, supported by sustainable, multi-year funding drawn from both assessed and voluntary contributions. Given the IGF's unique role as an open, inclusive, and multi-stakeholder space, the draft should also reaffirm support for National, Regional, and Youth IGFs (NRIs) and for the IGF's intersessional work, recognising these as core components of the global internet governance ecosystem. This commitment should be explicitly linked to SDG 16, which promotes inclusive, participatory, and effective institutions.

Enhanced cooperation (paragraphs 63-64): We recommend that references to enhanced cooperation should refer to all governments participating on an equal footing and having equal capacity; and at the same time make clear that internet governance arrangements must be multistakeholder and decentralised. Furthermore, the zero draft could position IGF as the multistakeholder forum where enhanced cooperation could be further discussed. Enhanced cooperation must not be framed in a way that centralises internet governance within multilateral structures. Rather, it must be interpreted in line with the WSIS Tunis Agenda, ensuring that all stakeholders, including civil society and technical communities participate in shaping public policy issues related to the Internet.

Cybersecurity and Confidence (paras 51–56): This section should refer to the importance of addressing challenges outlined in paragraph 53 in a way that is underpinned and governed by the international human rights framework. As outlined above, there is a continued securitisation of issues relating to addressing hate speech, disinformation and bullying (identified in those paragraphs) that has led to over-reaching powers being used in countries across the world in ways that undermine human rights and threaten civic space.

This has been documented by civil society and academic researchers including the research of the EU SEE project which are available here: https://eusee.hivos.org/alerts/. These trends are also echoed in the recorded decline of online freedoms over the last fourteen years in the annual reports dedicated to the documentation of online freedoms published by Freedom House. Furthermore, reference to the cybercrime convention should be removed as concerns remain that this instrument could be used to undermine human rights (see: https://lens.civicus.org/un-cybercrime-convention-a-troubling-new-treaty/).

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

The development of the WSIS framework should be underpinned by coherence with other relevant frameworks, and an inclusive, open and transparent multistakeholder approach. Specifically, it should:

- Strengthen existing multistakeholder forums at the UN: the IGF, the national and regional IGFs (NRIs) and WSIS Forum;
- Ensure greater cohesion between different UN mechanisms: The next phase of WSIS and SDG implementation should prioritise stronger alignment with the international human rights framework. This includes improving coordination with relevant UN human rights mechanisms, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and ensuring coherence with parallel processes like the Global Digital Compact.
- Develop mutually reinforcing implementation roadmaps between relevant agencies: UNGIS would provide strategic oversight of both WSIS and GDC implementation. To ensure that this oversight is inclusive and participatory, it's proposed that UNGIS be supported by a multistakeholder steering committee, a group including not only governments and UN bodies, but also civil society, the private sector, and possibly technical experts or researchers.
- Avoid duplication and fragmentation. Integrate the implementation of the Global Digital Compact within the WSIS process in order to ensure that there is no duplication or division of resourcing for two processes, and complementarity relating to its intended objectives and relevant objectives are leveraged.

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

As the WSIS+20 process continues, it is essential that it continues to implement measures to ensure it is an open, inclusive and transparent process. Specific steps required for this are included in this joint civil society input: www.gp-digital.org/wsis20-five-point-plan-follow-up-eight-practical-recommendations

It is also recommended that the Zero Draft refer to relevant multistakeholder driven normative texts, namely the São Paulo Principles, also known as the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines, which are a set of 13 guidelines developed at NETmundial+10, building upon the original NETmundial principles from 2014: https://netmundial.br/pdf/NETmundial10-MultistakeholderStatement-2024.pdf

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

Daniela Alvarado Rincón, on behalf of the EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society (EU SEE)

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

Please enter an email