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WSIS+20 Stakeholder Consultations: UNESCO Inputs to the Elements Paper

As part of the preparatory process for the WSIS+20 High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly (16–17 December 2025), this written consultation seeks inputs from all stakeholders to inform the Zero Draft of the outcome document. This process is aligned with the ***indicative roadmap shared by the WSIS+20 Co-Facilitators (Albania and Kenya)*** *and will feed into negotiations through the Elements Paper and subsequent drafts. Your responses will contribute to shaping a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society, reaffirming WSIS principles while addressing emerging digital trends and governance challenges.*

Deadline for inputs: 25 July extended

The Elements Paper:
https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/2025/WSIS%2B20_ElementsPaper_20June.pdf

Based on contributions from:

- CI/FMD/FEJ, CI/DPT/UAI, CI/DPT/IFAP, CI/FMD/MIL, CI/DPT/DIT, CI/DPT/DHE

- SHS, SC/PBS, CLT/DCE, ED, GEN

Q1 : What are the most important **achievements** arising from WSIS that should be highlighted in the Zero Draft?

1. Enhanced Access to Information and Digital Rights
WSIS has contributed to a global increase in Access to Information laws, digital content availability, and digital literacy, reflected in stronger multilateral engagement and legislation on platform accountability and content governance. Notable milestones include the inclusion of SDG 16.10 in the 2030 Agenda (2015), the unanimous endorsement of the Windhoek+30 Declaration on information as a public good, and the 2023 UNESCO Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms, which promote transparency, freedom of expression, and access to diverse content while addressing disinformation and hate speech.

2. Linguistic Inclusion and Multilingualism Online
WSIS has supported initiatives like the introduction of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) by ICANN, enabling internet access in native scripts and reducing language barriers. It has also encouraged the development of multilingual content on search engines and social media, promoting broader participation in the digital space. These are of particular significance for indigenous and minority languages, in alignment with the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032).

3. Ethical Governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI)
The adoption of the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021) stands as a major WSIS-aligned achievement. As the first global normative framework on AI ethics,

it emphasizes human rights, inclusive governance, and ethical AI deployment. It has influenced national reforms and informed global processes such as the Global Digital Compact and G20/G7 discussions.

4. Advancing Media and Information Literacy (MIL)
WSIS has supported the global recognition of MIL as a critical skill for navigating digital environments. Through initiatives like the MIL Curriculum (piloted in over 30 countries), Global MIL Week (a UN-recognized observance), and the UNESCO MIL Alliance (active in over 100 countries), MIL is increasingly integrated into national policies and education systems. These efforts include policy frameworks, educator training, youth engagement, and open learning resources.

5. Strengthening Public Digital Learning Platforms
In partnership with UNICEF, UNESCO has advanced the 'Gateways Initiative' to support countries in developing public digital learning platforms. As of July 2025, over 20 countries have joined the initiative. Study visits in China, Indonesia and Egypt, , along with webinars and case studies, have facilitated cross-border learning and content sharing, helping countries extend public education into digital environments.

6. Promoting Diamond Open Access
Aligned with WSIS goals, UNESCO launched a global process to develop a Global Framework on Diamond Open Access. Based on equity, multilingualism, and knowledge as a public good, the initiative followed a global consultation involving nearly 2,900 stakeholders from 92 Member States. The process aims to strengthen non-commercial scholarly communication through inclusive governance, public funding, and regional infrastructure.

7. Institutionalizing Open Educational Resources (OER)
Since the 2002 introduction of the OER concept, WSIS supported its evolution into a global movement, including the Paris OER Declaration (2012), Ljubljana OER Action Plan (2017), UNESCO Recommendation on OER (2019), and Dubai Declaration on OER (2024). These frameworks have guided national and regional policies, promoted open licensing and co-creation, and strengthened digital learning infrastructure.

8. Inclusive Multistakeholder Participation
WSIS has emphasized the importance of inclusive stakeholder engagement, involving not only governments and industry but also youth and civil society. This approach has helped ensure that digital transformation efforts reflect diverse perspectives and promote equitable access to knowledge. This approach was also used for the development of the UNESCO Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms, which was a product of more than 10,000 comments from relevant stakeholders in 134 countries. It also lies at the core of UNESCO's Internet Universality R.O.A.M framework

(Rights-based, Open, Accessible Internet governed through multi-stakeholder cooperation).

9. UNESCO's Internet Universality ROAM-X framework

Grounded in the principles of Human Rights, Openness, Accessibility, Multistakeholder participation, and Cross-cutting issues) ROAM-X and its indicators became a widely adopted tool, implemented in over 40 countries, to assess national digital environments and inform rights-based, inclusive policy reforms.

10. Capacity building on AI and Digital Transformation

UNESCO's work on AI and digital transformation strongly aligns with the WSIS vision by advancing inclusive, multi-stakeholder capacity-building across public sectors. New initiatives such as the AI and Digital Transformation Competency Framework for Civil Servants, the SPARK-AI Alliance of schools of public administrations, and training on AI and the Rule of Law for judges have been launched to strengthen the capacities of governments, judiciaries, and parliamentarians. UNESCO's Judges Initiative has engaged over 36,000 judicial operators across 160 countries over the past 12 years on freedom of expression, access to information, AI and the rule of law. These efforts support WSIS goals by promoting ethical, human-centred digital transformation and reinforcing institutional readiness for the digital age.

Q2 : 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?

1. Challenged Media Viability and Freedom

A major challenge is the viability crisis of media, which threatens diversity, pluralism, and freedom of expression. The financial sustainability of independent journalism is undermined by digital platform dominance, loss of advertising revenue, and AI-driven content distribution. This weakens access to public interest information and erodes trust in media, while online harassment—especially targeting women and marginalized voices—further restricts civic space.

2. Inequitable Access to Scientific Knowledge

Particularly in the Global South, many countries lack high-performance computing, open access repositories, and discovery platforms, limiting their ability to contribute to and benefit from global scholarship. Additionally, digital infrastructures often lack quality and credibility indicators, hindering trust in open scientific resources. The Diamond Open Access model faces funding gaps, limited institutional support, and lack of recognition in academic systems.

4. Underrepresentation of Science and Emerging Technologies
Basic science, quantum technologies, and metrology remain insufficiently integrated into digital policy agendas, limiting their contribution to digital transformation and innovation.

5. Linguistic Marginalization in Technology
Many Indigenous and minority languages are excluded from language technologies such as speech recognition and translation tools. This digital marginalization contributes to language extinction and exacerbates digital inequality.

6. Fragmented Governance and Human Rights Oversight
Efforts around digital inclusion, multilingualism, and AI fairness are fragmented. There is a need for coherent global governance and institutionalized tools like Ethical Impact Assessments (EIA) to ensure human rights are upheld in digital environments. Implementation of frameworks like UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI remains weak, especially in the Global South, risking a digital ethics divide. Notably, there is a need to strengthen human rights oversight on digital issues by supporting the Universal Periodic Review process of the UN Human Rights Council through enhanced evidence-based reporting of human rights violations in the digital sphere and by strengthening capacities of governments, civil society organizations and UN delegations to engage with the digital dimensions of human rights.

7. Disinformation, Hate Speech, and Digital Violence
The rise of digital platforms has fueled disinformation, hate speech, and gender-based violence, undermining democratic processes and human rights. Regulatory responses are often fragmented or overly restrictive, including internet shutdowns and misuse of hate speech laws, which shrink civic space and threaten freedom of expression.

8. Limited Media and Information Literacy (MIL)
MIL integration into education systems remains limited, despite the growing need for critical competencies to navigate AI-driven content ecosystems and combat disinformation. The rapid evolution of digital technologies demands urgent investment in MIL.

9. Difficulties protecting Cultural Rights and Intellectual Property
While digital platforms democratize cultural expression, artists face challenges in protecting intellectual property due to piracy, inconsistent legal enforcement, and opaque compensation models. AI-generated content further complicates authorship, attribution, and remuneration, raising unresolved legal and ethical issues.

10. Uneven Digital Learning and Educational Equity
Despite global efforts, digital learning remains uneven. Many countries lack robust public digital learning platforms with high-quality, inclusive, and multilingual content. Teachers often lack training in effectively using digital tools and Open Educational

Resources (OER). More coordinated efforts, including South-South cooperation, are needed to build resilient and equitable digital education systems.

11. Internet Universality ROAM-X assessments have underscored critical gaps in infrastructure, affordability, and digital inclusion. In parallel, concerns around privacy, data protection, and freedom of expression remain pressing, with emerging challenges like the ethical governance of AI and the environmental impact of the digital sector demanding stronger global cooperation and integrated, rights-based policy responses.

12. Strengthening Public Sector Capacity for Rights-Based Digital Governance

A key challenge to achieving WSIS outcomes is the limited capacity of governments, judiciaries, and parliamentarians to engage with AI and emerging technologies in ways that uphold human rights and people-centred governance. Rapid technological change often outpaces policy and regulatory readiness, risking exclusion and misuse. Addressing this requires targeted capacity building, practical tools, and inclusive networks to equip public actors with the skills needed to govern digital technologies ethically and effectively.

Q3 : 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 of a "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society" in light of emerging trends, the following priorities for action are essential:

1. Foster Open, Inclusive, and Equitable Science

- **Promote Open Science**: Align with the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science to close gaps in infrastructure, tools, and digital skills, ensuring equitable participation in e-science and fair distribution of digital transformation benefits.
- **Strengthen STI Ecosystems**: Integrate open science into science, technology, and innovation (STI) systems to democratize access to enabling technologies and foster inclusive innovation.

- **Advance Remote Access**: Support initiatives like UNESCO's Remote Access to Laboratory Equipment to empower researchers in underserved regions.
- **Invest in STEM Education**: Prioritize digital STEM and frontier-tech literacy, especially for youth and educators, within frameworks like the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development (IDSSD) and the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology (IYQ2025).

2. Advance inclusive access to scientific knowledge

- **Develop a Global Policy Framework on Diamond Open Access**: Promote public, non-commercial scholarly communication through coordinated policies, sustainable funding, and institutional capacity-building.
- **Support Regional and Multilingual Models**: Encourage regionally led, internationally recognized models that include multilingual editorial workflows and indexing services.
- **Enhance Equity in Scholarship**: Focus on capacity-building in underrepresented regions to reduce systemic bias and promote inclusive global research collaboration.

3. Promote Linguistic Diversity and Local Content

- **Strengthen Multilingualism**: Address the dominance of a few languages online by supporting digital tools and resources for Indigenous and minority languages.
- **Inclusive AI Development**: Ensure AI models are trained on diverse linguistic and cultural data to avoid reinforcing biases and to preserve oral traditions and cultural nuances.
- **Community-Driven Language Technologies**: Develop technologies rooted in local languages and cultures through open resources and community collaboration.

4. Ensure Human Rights-Based Digital Governance

- **Implement UNESCO's Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms**: Adopt governance models that uphold freedom of expression and access to information, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and multistakeholder participation, including through independent regulatory systems.

- **Address Online Harms**: Develop and adopt policies aligned to international human rights standards, due diligence, that include gender-responsive and inclusive measures to protect vulnerable groups and promote fairness in digital platform governance.
- **Ethical AI Deployment**: Use Ethical Impact Assessment tools to align AI systems with human rights and societal values.
- **Strengthen evidence base and visibility of digital rights within the UPR:** Promote accountability, policy coherence, ensuring digital transformation efforts are aligned with international human rights standards.

5. Build Inclusive AI Readiness and Capacity

- **Adopt AI Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM)**: Support countries, especially in the Global South, in developing inclusive, rights-based AI policies through national dialogue and capacity-building.
- **Promote Ethical and Inclusive AI**: Encourage open-source AI models and responsible AI use in science and development.

6. Continue to support Independent Media and Information Literacy

- **Sustain Independent Media**: Address the financial crisis facing independent media through coordinated international support and principles like those in the "Media Viability Manifesto."
- **Embed Media and Information Literacy (MIL)**: Recognize MIL as a core digital competency, integrating it into education, public service, and community programs, with a focus on AI, data privacy, and ethical tech use.

7. Protect and Promote Cultural Diversity

- **Enhance Cultural Data Collection**: Use mechanisms like UNESCO's Quadrennial Periodic Reporting to understand cultural participation and access.
- **Empower Cultural Stakeholders**: Build capacity among governments, institutions, and communities to shape digital technologies.
- **Adapt Policies for Cultural Rights**: Safeguard cultural diversity and intellectual property while mitigating algorithmic bias.

8. Expand Access to Digital Public Goods

- **Promote Open Educational Resources (OER)**: Implement open licensing and interoperable platforms to ensure inclusive access, especially for marginalized groups.
- **Leverage Emerging Technologies**: Use AI for multilingual translation and accessibility in education.

9. Strengthening Digital Capacity through Global Cooperation

- **Align digital development with the ROAM principles:** Rights-based, Open, Accessible, and Multistakeholder—UNESCO's Internet Universality Indicators empower nations to assess and enhance their digital ecosystems, fostering inclusive global cooperation and sustainable digital capacity building. **Strengthening digital capacity as a foundational priority: Through coordinated multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation, support** capacity development initiatives grounded in principles of equity, sustainability, and co-creation.
- **Empower educators and support inclusive digital ecosystems:** Using tools like UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for Teachers and the UNESCO/UNICEF Gateways project .

Develop and implement Digital and AI Competency Frameworks: Through targeted training and international cooperation platforms- such as workshops, MOOCs, and alliances—while actively partnering with national and regional training institutions. These collaborations will equip public sector leaders and decision-makers with the knowledge, skills, and ethical guidance needed for human rights-based, people-centred governance of digital technologies.

Q4: What **additional themes/issues**, if any, should be included in the Elements Paper?

To strengthen the WSIS+20 Elements Paper, the following additional themes and issues should be incorporated:

1. Leveraging ICTs for Scientific Continuity and Resilience in Crises
The WSIS+20 Review should emphasize the strategic role of ICTs in ensuring the continuity of scientific research during crises. This includes protecting scientific infrastructure and personnel, enabling open access to scientific data, and deploying digital tools that support emergency response, resilience, and recovery—especially in post-conflict and fragile contexts.

2. Bridging the Gender Digital Divide
A dedicated paragraph should be added under the "Bridging digital divides" section, following paragraph 30, to address gender disparities in digital access and use.
Suggested text:
"Gender equality should be mainstreamed in the post WSIS+20 implementation in order to bridge the gender digital divide and foster meaningful connectivity of women and girls in the digital and AI age. Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in today's digital landscape by fostering gender-responsive and transformative policies are paramount for fostering digital inclusion and achieving 2030 SDGs."

3. Media Viability and Journalist Safety
While recognizing the role of independent and public service media in fostering an inclusive information society, the Elements Paper should also call for concrete measures to support media viability. It should address threats to journalist safety, including online and offline harassment, privacy violations, technology-facilitated violence (especially gender-based), and increasing censorship pressures.

4. Multilingualism and Local Content as Cross-Cutting Themes
All WSIS Action Lines should explicitly integrate linguistic diversity and the promotion of local content. This includes embedding multilingualism and cultural relevance in infrastructure, capacity building, cybersecurity, and e-governance policies, ensuring inclusivity across the digital ecosystem.

5. Ethics as a Cross-Cutting Dimension
Building on UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, WSIS+20 should reaffirm the importance of ethical frameworks in digital governance. Ethical principles—transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and sustainability—should guide digital education, cybersecurity, and ICT infrastructure development across all WSIS Action Lines.

6. Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as a Cross-Cutting Enabler
MIL should be explicitly recognized as a foundational enabler across all WSIS Action Lines. Its role in promoting information integrity, combating online harms, supporting public interest journalism, and fostering trust in digital environments is essential for inclusive digital development.

7. Information Integrity

Recognizing that information integrity is critical to protect democratic processes and society, the Elements Paper should recognize it as a cross-cutting element, highlighting the need for WSIS to reposition itself and play a greater role in facilitating and strengthening international cooperation to address misinformation, disinformation and

hate speech online, and safeguard information as a public good, in line with international human rights laws and the Windhoek+30 Declaration.

8. Preservation and Accessibility of Documentary Heritage
The Elements Paper should recognize the preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage as a strategic emerging issue. Under UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme, efforts such as the archiving and preservation of software and the digitization of analogue heritage are vital. These initiatives support education, youth engagement, and intercultural dialogue. The responsible use of AI in managing and preserving heritage should be explored for its potential to bridge digital divides and advance the SDGs. Integration of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies, including preventive preservation and secure digital backups, is also crucial to protect heritage from natural and human-induced threats.

9. Expanding the WSIS Framework in Education
The WSIS framework should broaden its scope to include:

- The responsible integration of AI and emerging technologies in education;
- The recognition and promotion of OER as digital public goods to ensure equitable access to knowledge;
- The sustainability of digital learning ecosystems through coherent policies, adequate funding, and capacity support.

The Dubai Declaration on OER, adopted at the 3rd UNESCO World OER Congress, offers actionable strategies aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure inclusive access to knowledge.

Q5: Do you wish to comment on particular themes/issues/paragraphs in the Elements Paper?

- The Elements Paper should place stronger emphasis on information integrity, which is an indispensable prerequisite for ensuring the safety of journalists, as well as the sustainability and diversity of independent and pluralistic media. This remains crucial for protecting and promoting freedom of expression and freedom of the press, particularly considering the challenges posed by new technologies.

- **Para 60** under "**Internet Governance**" should not only recognize the role of IGF but all the intersessional activities and NRIs with suggested text as follows:

  "The IGF, including **NRIs (National and Regional IGFs) and intersessional activities including Dynamic Coalitions (now over 30) and Policy Networks,**

which provide channels for proactive deep dives into emerging digital issues and deliver concrete outcomes, should play a bigger role in digital cooperation worldwide including capacity building in Global South."

- Suggested Insertion after Paragraph 81: "Strengthening capacity development through the strategic use of OER and openly licensed content constitutes a key enabler for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable digital transformation."

- Paragraph 21 refers to disaster preparedness and paragraph 22 addresses crisis preparedness. It would be valuable to highlight the important role that ICTs can play in providing concrete solutions for S*cience in Crisis* situations, including protecting scientists and research infrastructure, ensuring continued access to scientific data, and providing digital tools that enable scientific work to continue during crises. For para 22, "cultural engagement" should be replaced by "cultural diversity".

- Paragraph 59 should replace the multilateral Internet governance model for multistakeholder. It would also be valuable if it recognized the need to ground it in universal values and evidence-based policymaking: "The governance of the Internet should be **multistakeholder**, transparent, and democratic, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, academia, and international organizations. **It should be grounded in universal values and informed by evidence-based, inclusive policymaking."**

- Paragraph 65: It would be valuable to add at the end: "This evolving data landscape highlights the urgent need for coherent, rights-based data governance models. The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development - co-chaired by UNESCO, UNDP, ITU, and the African Union Commission – has developed a new resource, the **Data Governance Toolkit: Navigating Data in the Digital Age**, which offers a practical, rights-based guide to help governments, institutions, and stakeholders make data work for all".

- Paragraph 66: suggestion to add: To help countries overcome institutional, legal, and technical barriers to effective data use, the **Data Governance Toolkit: Navigating Data in the Digital Age** offers actionable frameworks across the entire data lifecycle. It includes tools to strengthen institutional capacity and cross-sector coordination; adaptable guidance on legal frameworks, privacy, digital self-determination, and interoperability; and a modular format featuring self-assessment instruments, curated resources, and training support.

Q6: What suggestions do you have to support the development of the **WSIS framework** (WSIS Action Lines, IGF, WSIS Forum, UNGIS etc.)?

- To strengthen the WSIS framework, it is essential to enhance UN system-wide coordination by capitalizing on the complementary mandates of UN agencies, funds, and programmes. UNGIS provides a coordination platform including through UN regional commissions to foster coherence through a more integrated approach across WSIS Action Lines, the WSIS Forum, and the IGF. Mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Working Group on Artificial Intelligence (IAWG-AI), and the CSTD Working Group on Data Governance can be leveraged to promote joint programming, shared accountability frameworks, and cross-agency knowledge exchange.
- **Encourage interlinkages with UNESCO's global science programmes**: Including the Open Science Recommendation, STEM strategy, science clubs, and youth-focused innovation ecosystems.
- MIL should be more systematically embedded in the WSIS framework using UNESCO's Global Media Partnership to drive multi-stakeholder collaboration and implementation.
- Advocate for greater support for the use of ICT for Science in Crisis initiatives.
- Promote the value added of synergies between the WISIS frameworks and the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development (2024-2033).
- Strengthen Participation of Linguistic and Minority Communities in the IGF and WSIS Forum: Support greater inclusion of Indigenous peoples, linguistic minorities, and grassroots groups in WSIS processes, aligning efforts with the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022-2032).
- Mainstream ethical frameworks into WSIS follow-up mechanisms, including the WSIS Forum and IGF. This includes integrating AI ethics, algorithmic transparency, and human rights safeguards into digital cooperation dialogues, building on the normative tools developed by UNESCO.
- Under para 32, reference can be made to "online services and ***cultural expressions"***
- Under para 37, reference can be made to "in aligning and ***reinforcing*** digital governance".
- Integrating OER into national education and training frameworks enhances institutional capacities, supports the localization and contextualization of learning materials, and fosters the co-creation of multilingual, accessible, and culturally relevant resources. Moreover, the promotion of user-generated content—exemplified by platforms such as Wikipedia, reinforce participatory approaches, knowledge equity, and international cooperation in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- Grounding Internet governance in evidence-based frameworks based on universal values.

Q7: Do you have any **other** comments?

- UNESCO's science programmes show that building an inclusive, development-oriented information society requires investing in people's ability to both use and create scientific knowledge. Digital transformation must therefore be tightly coupled with science capacity-building, especially in underserved regions.