# *WSIS+20 Stakeholder Consultations: Input to the Elements Paper from the Fellows of the European Summer School on Internet Governance (EuroSSIG)*

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**Introduction to the Practicum**

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. 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.

These consultations where subject to the multistakeholder practicum of the 19th European Summer School on Internet Governance (EuroSSIG), which took place on 27 July - 2 August in Meissen / Germany. Fellows worked in groups of 4-5, with each group focussing on answering one question (Q1-6). Each group presented their results to the whole cohort and answered questions. After listening to all 6 groups, each group had time to reflect on and process the input. The next step was the presentation of the final answers to Q1-6, to reach consensus among all EuroSSIG Fellows and to create a joint submission.

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

1. Universal and Meaningful Access

One of WSIS's key achievements is the dramatic growth in internet access and connectivity. In 2005, fewer than 1 billion people were online. Today, over 5.5 billion people -around 68% of the global population-are actively connected, achieving a 450% increase over 20 years. We've moved from basic internet access to meaningful connectivity. Supported by major digital infrastructure growth making internet services more affordable, reliable, and resilient.

2. Gender Digital Divide

Women's access to digital technologies has significantly increased with 65% of women globally being internet users by 2024. While the gender gap in internet access minimized between 2021-2024, it remains behind inclusivity goals for equal access. The WSIS+20 review emphasized that digital transformation must be inclusive to be sustainable, making the integration of gender perspective into all digital policies fundamental.

3. Youth Involvement

WSIS+20 acknowledged the rising inclusion of youth in internet policy discussions. Concrete steps have been established to formally recognize young people as key stakeholders. The creation of the Youth Special Track grouping 300 youth for this edition and featuring interactive workshops, networking events, and an intergenerational High-Level Dialogue, demonstrated that intergenerational cooperation introduces new ideas, reflects the lived realities of future digital users, and strengthens multistakeholder governance models.

4. Promoting digital equity through multilingualism

A key contribution of WSIS is its commitment to digital inclusion through linguistic diversity. Efforts to localize content and provide access in multiple languages supporting broader internet access and cultural relevance. Efforts have been made to provide local content in a variety of languages and formats through the deployment of internationalized domain names (IDN) supported by ICANN, as part of removing language-based barriers to meaningful participation in digital space.

5. Strengthening Digital Skills and Capacity Building

WSIS catalyzed long-term investment in digital literacy and capacity development. Action Line C4 on capacity building, along with partnerships involving UNESCO, ITU, and other stakeholders, enabled the design of people-centered digital education initiatives. These programs support foundational digital skills, help underrepresented groups engage meaningfully in digital ecosystems (Line 78-80).

6. Multistakeholder Model and Internet governance language

One of the most enduring outcomes of WSIS is the institutionalization of the multistakeholder model (Line 5). First affirmed in the Tunis Agenda (2005), this model is now a baseline for inclusive and transparent digital policymaking.

WSIS facilitated the creation of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), and encouraged the development of regional and national IGFs to provide a primary multi-stakeholder platform for internet governance issues discussions (Line 60). WSIS helped establish a shared policy vocabulary and principles that underpin today's internet governance frameworks.

7. Linking ICTs with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

WSIS helped reposition ICTs as enablers of broader development goals, for the 2030 agenda, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, that shed the light on the transformative power and potential of digital access and use (Line 13). The concept of "meaningful connectivity" emerged from WSIS+20 as a holistic measure of digital inclusion - ensuring that access is not only available, but also affordable, reliable, safe, and usable.
These principles are now closely tied to SDGs in areas such as e-education, e-health, etc.

8. Safeguarding Human Rights

Finally, WSIS+20 reaffirmed the importance of protecting human rights in digital contexts. Key priorities include safeguarding freedom of expression, ensuring personal data protection, and addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence. (Line 43-44).

**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. Access X *enhancing connectivity*

We should continue to address inequalities in accessing the Internet and information (workstations, broadband, content, devices, stable connection), as well as in developing usage skills and media literacy to safely navigate the Internet. Financial constraints remain a barrier to connectivity, for governments and companies to deliver services, and for users to afford staying connected. Connecting remote areas, marginalized groups or parts of the Global South remains a challenge, with one-third of the global population still being offline.

2. Limiting the gender division X *continuing the efforts*

The digital divide affects mostly women and girls, particularly in the Global South. There are still 189 million more men online than women. In ICT fields only 28% of the total labour force are women, which makes STEM fields still male-dominated. Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on how to better offer support on the basis of gender, age, geography, income and education levels.

3. Youth involvement X *increasing youth involvement*

Youth initiatives remain scarce and under-resourced compared to the scale of youth populations globally, and have low visibility and weak ties to national policymaking. More investment, inclusivity, representation, and coordination are needed to strengthen their impact and ensure youth voices are meaningfully included in digital policy discussions. We need to allocate more resources and increase the capacity to provide consistent support.

4. Promoting digital equity X *including the Global South*

The participation rate and depth of involvement of the Global South, especially non-state actors, needs to be enhanced. The input from these countries is sometimes overlooked during decision-making and overshadowed by the influence of major powers and large corporations. The voices of these countries need to be truly heard, taken into account and we should focus on meaningful engagement that enables real input and influence on decisions, locally, regionally and globally.

5. Strengthening digital skills X *digital divide*

The lack of multiculturalism affects the people in the Global South, especially the indigenous communities and linguistic minorities. Also, limited resources and funding hinder the scalability and sustainability of capacity-building programs, and the insufficient ICT infrastructure can impede effective capacity development initiatives.

6. Multistakeholder model X *digital divide*

Coordination and collaboration are a challenge because stakeholders have their own mandates, needs and priorities with regard to the varying levels of ICT development. Stakeholders may lack the necessary skills and resources to effectively participate in the ICT for development agenda. Additionally, to enhance the policy impact of the IGF, we would encourage that the IGF conclusions are linked to the WSIS Action Lines in order to create a feedback loop.

7. Linking ICTs with sustainable development goals X *digital development goals*

Challenges remain in effectively implementing SDGs in a new context, suitable to a digital reality. In the field of e-education, weak digital infrastructure and insufficient ICT skills have led to disparities in the coverage and quality of remote learning. In terms of climate resilience, the growing energy consumption and carbon emissions of ICT infrastructure, coupled with the surge in electronic waste and its improper disposal, have further increased environmental pressures.

8. Safeguarding human rights X *digital divide*

In safeguarding human rights, challenges remain regarding universal access to the internet, freedom of speech and addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence. The internet shapes how people access and share information. A significant challenge is the increase of misinformation to shape opinions aimed to suppress, limit or violate human rights through digital bias, censorship or surveillance.

**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?**

1. Mandate and Process

We ask that the WSIS+20 review formally reaffirm the multistakeholder approach as the core principle of Internet governance, as recognized in the NETmundial+10 São Paulo Principles and WSIS Action Line C1. This requires ensuring that all stakeholders—including governments, the private sector, civil society, and the technical and academic communities—can participate on an equal footing across all relevant forums and processes. To this end, the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum must be strengthened and renewed with sustainable funding and a greater capacity for impact.

The IGF must remain the primary global multistakeholder platform for dialogue on digital policy, with meaningful participation from the global south and marginalized backgrounds, as emphasized in paragraphs 60–62 of the elements paper and in the GDC. Furthermore, these multistakeholder principles must be applied to the governance of emerging technologies, such as AI, immersive tech, and quantum systems. This ensures that governance frameworks are technologically neutral, rights-based, and inclusive, which helps avoid fragmentation and supports effective, anticipatory governance as noted in paragraph 58.

2. Education

We call for the strengthening of education systems by integrating critical digital and AI-related competencies across all levels of learning, from formal schooling to lifelong learning initiatives. This aligns with Action Line C4 (Capacity Building) and the WSIS vision, which prioritizes skills in digital ethics, cybersecurity awareness, and data protection. To ensure this education is truly inclusive, it must be multilingual, addressing linguistic divides as outlined in Action Line C8 and leveraging tools like Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) to enhance access.

Achieving this requires a robust multistakeholder approach, involving all stakeholder groups in the development of relevant and culturally sensitive educational programs. Initiatives like the Schools of Internet Governance (SIGs) and National/Regional IGFs (NRIs) exemplify how such collaboration can build digital governance capacity, especially among youth and marginalized communities. By supporting inclusive participation, digital literacy, and broad capacity-building efforts, we empower individuals not just to use digital tools, but to actively and critically participate in shaping the digital ecosystems of the future, thereby fulfilling the core principles of WSIS and advancing Quality Education (SDG 4).

3. Social and Environmental Sustainability

When setting priorities for Internet governance, it is essential that social and environmental sustainability are placed at the core of digital transformation. We call for the review to prioritize the explicit alignment of digital agendas with the SDGs, especially those for climate action (SDG 13), quality education (SDG 4), and affordable and clean energy (SDG 7). In line with Action Line C7 (E-environment), this includes promoting environmental sustainability across the digital ecosystem by minimizing resource consumption and fostering the adoption of green technologies.

On the social front, we should foster inclusive digital infrastructure through the expansion of community networks and public access points, particularly in underserved regions, as emphasized in Action Line C2. This effort to ensure universal and equitable connectivity is a key enabler of social inclusion.

Finally, we stress the importance of advancing a fair, inclusive, and accountable digital platform economy. In accordance with Action Line C5 (Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs), this requires clear governance mechanisms to enhance transparency, safeguard user rights, and strengthen accountability of dominant digital platforms.

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

Triple S: Safe, Smart, and Secure

Protecting Children and Youth in a Digital World

1. Considerations and comments:

We urge the WSIS+20 process to prioritize the protection of children and youth in digital environments as a foundational element of inclusive, sustainable, and rights-based digital development. Although young people are among the most active internet users, they are also particularly vulnerable to online harms, cyberbullying, algorithmic profiling, and exposure to harmful content. The openness of the Internet that fosters engagement has also enabled cross-border abuse, which underscores that without decisive action, the digital world's benefits for youth risk being undermined by its dangers. Without urgent and coordinated action, the digital ecosystem risks failing to safeguard the rights and well-being of its youngest users.

2. Gaps and Emerging Challenges:

Numerous countries have implemented national laws and codes to safeguard children online. Yet, international coordination remains limited, and current efforts amount to a patchwork of regulations that vary by jurisdiction, leaving significant enforcement gaps across transnational online services.

Children's rights and privacy are routinely undermined in digital environments that were not designed with them in mind. Cross-border accountability remains weak; platforms and games popular among youth often operate under lax regulations from other jurisdictions. As the digital landscape evolves with generative AI, immersive technologies, and data-driven profiling, risks to minors are magnified.

Despite longstanding international commitments, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comment No. 25 (2021), which affirms that children's rights apply online as they do offline, implementation remains uneven. Structural gaps such as weak regulatory capacity, inadequate age verification tools and low digital literacy among adults

hinder effective protection. Even WSIS acknowledged over two decades ago the need to *"protect children from abuse and defend their rights in the context of ICTs"*. Yet the digital ecosystem still fails to ensure safety, privacy, and participation for all children. Digital governance must now be reoriented with child-rights to safeguard their development, and dignity in increasingly immersive and AI-driven environments.

3. Suggestions

To address these considerations, we propose that WSIS+20 incorporate the following actions:

A. Establish a WSIS Working Group on Children and Youth Protection Online with a mandate to develop global strategies, international policies, and improve cross-border coordination.
B. Integrate child protection principles into AI, algorithms, and platform design, requiring privacy for digital products likely to be used by children. Tech companies should meet clear transparency and accountability obligations, including independent audits and public reporting on child safety practices.
C. Strengthen capacity-building and education to empower and protect youth online. This includes targeted digital literacy for children, parents, and educators, support for local initiatives and NGOs, and the promotion of best practices such as child-friendly design, rights-respecting parental tools, and accessible reporting mechanisms.

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

1. Social and Cultural Development

The multistakeholder community should place greater emphasis on the need for robust privacy and security safeguards to build trust in e-government and digital ID systems, especially for marginalized groups. At the regional level, support to countries in formulating or updating inclusive SDG-aligned digital strategies is key. This should include developing tools to measure digital policy impacts on equity and inclusion, ensuring multilingual content.

2. Environmental Impacts

Reducing ICTs' environmental footprint needs partnerships with ITU and UNEP to set e-waste standards. Sustainability should be embedded across the tech lifecycle. WSIS can contribute by advancing eco-design rules for durable devices, with producers responsible for end-of-life reuse.

3. Artificial Intelligence

AI development and data resources are driven by certain countries, raising global imbalance concerns. Inclusive AI needs efforts to reduce bias and expand access to research and infrastructure. WSIS should foster collaboration on ethical AI, capacity-building, and diverse perspectives in governance.

4. Data Governance

For fostering equitable and trustworthy data ecosystems, nations need ethical data and AI governance guidelines shaped with industry and civil society. Advancing interoperable data protection frameworks will support secure cross-border data flows, reduce regulatory fragmentation, and enhance trust among businesses and users.

5. Capacity Building

For enhancing capacity building, industry-led digital skills training should be developed with governments and UN agencies, focusing on workforce development and digital entrepreneurship. Platforms can share best practices, and digital literacy should cover cybersecurity, privacy, and misinformation.

6. Bridging Digital Divides

Automated translation tools play a vital role in bridging the digital divide, but overreliance on generic translations risks harming cultural and linguistic diversity. Policies should reflect this. Building digital and media literacy competence should be included in media platforms' design, with multidisciplinary work groups. Platform architecture should support users' critical engagement with information to counter misinformation, algorithmic bias, and data-driven incentives.

7. Digital Economy

Global South continues to struggle with resources and restricted budgets; promoting the digital economy and its applications necessitates financial aid from Global South. Assistance to underprivileged families and communities in acquiring smart devices and training on their use, along with education on digital systems, mobile banking, and e-business, is vital. If digital systems operate effectively, many may lose jobs, requiring new employment options.

8. Building Confidence and Security in the Use of ICTs

To advance inclusive and secure digital development, WSIS+20 should reaffirm the need for a global cybersecurity culture that protects data, supports digital trade, and upholds human rights to build trust and inclusive participation. It should also promote capacity-building through education and training and call for adaptive cybersecurity strategies to safeguard critical infrastructure.

9. Monitoring and Measurement

To support global digital progress, WSIS+20 should involve all groups, including the Global South, civil society, and marginalized communities, in how data is collected and managed. It should set shared indicators to measure digital access, data use, cybersecurity, and AI in line with global goals. Data should be broken down by gender, age, disability, and region to help close gaps. It should also promote open, user-friendly data systems so all countries can participate. Data, especially when used with AI, must be handled responsibly, protecting privacy, human rights, and security.

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

1. WSIS Action Lines

The WSIS review should retain and re-commit to the Action Lines, while clarifying how they map to new and emerging issues like AI, and existing commitments to human rights and gender equality.

2. Implementation of the WSIS framework

We support the proposal by Switzerland, Australia and the EU to establish a unified roadmap for the follow-up, review and implementation of the WSIS and the Global Digital Compact (GDC). We propose that this roadmap establish a clear framework for monitoring the future implementation of the Action Lines and the GDC commitments, supported by a genuinely multistakeholder review process. This would enlarge the roles of the CSTD, ECOSOC and the IGF to also cover the GDC follow-up and review.

There is a need to robustly integrate a rights-based approach to WSIS implementation, building on the extensive work of the OHCHR and the human rights mechanisms on human rights-based Internet public policy making. Gender equality should also be integrated into all the WSIS Action Lines with specific goals, targets and indicators to ensure a gender responsive approach to the implementation of the WSIS framework.

We support the proposal by Australia to undertake a review of the WSIS Action Line facilitators to ensure alignment with current mandates and capacities, adding OHCHR, UN Women and UNICEF.

3. Follow-up and review

The Review and monitoring of the implementation of the WSIS framework is led by different UN actors and bodies, each playing a different role. As the principal multistakeholder forum for Internet public policy issues, the IGF should be leveraged to facilitate structured stakeholder dialogue on WSIS implementation for consideration by the CSTD and the ECOSOC. The WSIS Forum should be strengthened to support enhanced multistakeholder dialogue on the goals set in WSIS outcome documents.

Across all forums, accessibility should be ensured. This requires hosting consultations in accessible locations, synchronising meetings according to time zones and offering travel

support to underrepresented groups. Governments should also organise local dialogues to inform national positions, integrating marginalised voices.

A. CSTD

Complementing this, the CSTD should be strengthened to enable additional multistakeholder engagement. For instance, annual reviews could be adapted to provide additional time for country and shadow reporting by non-governmental stakeholders, and to facilitate interaction. The CSTD committee could also be supported by a multistakeholder sounding board in the same manner as the WSIS+20 Informal Multistakeholder Sounding Board.

B. IGF

The IGF is the primary multistakeholder forum for discussion of Internet-related public policy issues. It should be institutionalised as a permanent forum, with strengthened staff capacity and permanent and stable funding. The permanence and stability of the IGF are crucial for its future as a multistakeholder platform which bridges stakeholder communities and regions and connects different Internet-related policy processes. It should also be noted that the work of the 180 national and regional IGFs and intersessional workstreams (NRIs) is critical to the IGF's success. They should be allocated additional resources so that they can continue to facilitate meaningful exchange, dialogue, and policy input.

C. AI Governance

Existing and future AI governance mechanisms should be strongly anchored in human rights and support the WSIS goal "to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society" that would enable individuals, communities and people to achieve their full potential, facilitate sustainable development and promote human rights.

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

The role of ICTs in crisis management

In light of global emergencies or critical situations, including natural disasters, technical failures, social unrest, armed conflict, and the forced displacement of populations, we recognise the value of addressing the role of ICTs in supporting effective crisis response, such as the use of the Internet in crisis management, enhancing electrical resilience, ensuring uninterrupted connectivity and the protection of critical infrastructure. Prioritising secure connectivity and ICT resilience implies an uninterrupted operation of, inter alia, financial systems, supply chains, essential public services, and ensures response, clarity, and national and global economic stability.

We emphasise the relevance of having a shared approach towards effective methods in preparation to ensure assistance through ICT to affected groups. To that end, we suggest that national roaming agreements can be put in place to allow continuous mobile service across neighbouring countries during emergencies at no cost for end users; as well as mutual support among telecommunications providers, including the sharing of mobile infrastructure and towers in times of crises, and temporary transfer of users. A back-up supplier, complementary to the main one, is an important aspect of telecom and electrical resilience and preserving continuity of service, from either a different national or foreign provider. A mechanism for emergency energy support from neighbouring countries should be developed, alongside plans to transition to renewable energy sources.

Clear, pre-established guidelines for inter-company and transnational coordination can also be considered, in the event of blackout or network failure, for first responders, technical teams, and the general public. Ensuring connectivity for mobile or in-transit populations that pass through high-risk or disrupted areas should be prioritised, as well as building multi-

layered communication infrastructures to avoid failure by relying on a single point. This includes investments in alternative routes, including underground, undersea, or ground-level infrastructures, fibre-optic networks, and necessary database back-up.

Moreover, social networking sites can help refugees or migrants access critical resources and assistance, by enabling them to share real-time needs at border crossings, along migration routes, or in affected areas. This allows others, including different stakeholders, to respond with targeted assistance or launch donation campaigns. This significantly reduces the time needed to coordinate and deliver aid, and better connects those in need. These community-driven initiatives often complement the efforts of governments, organisations, and inter-agency networks; coordinating or making such efforts visible can enable access to vital information, thereby empowering more targeted and immediate forms of help.

Geolocation tracking, telecom analytics, mobile phone, and data networks can be used to map access routes and needs or provide insights into population movements and enhance emergency preparedness. Regarding natural disasters, data, satellite imagery and digital sensors can be used to get more accurate meteorological forecasting and ensure safe interventions. In addition, the use of more inclusive technologies such as voice alerts, sign language-enabled broadcasts, guarantees that people with disabilities are not left behind in emergency response and recovery efforts.

We support the collective approach and partnership among governments, the private sector, and civil society to ensure uninterrupted connectivity, protect critical infrastructure, maintain interoperability, and foster adaptability in critical situations. Priority should be given to improving inclusive outreach mechanisms, fostering multi-stakeholder cooperation, and ensuring access to services for citizens, migrants, and refugees, while developing a reliable and resilient system.

**Q8: Who is submitting this input?**

| **Name** | **Nationality** | **Organisation** | **Stakeholder group** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fellows of the 2025 EuroSSIG Class<br><br>(See: https://eurossig.eu/eurossig/2025-edition/fellows-2025/) | global | European Summer School on Internet Governance (EuroSSIG) | multi-stakeholder |

Q9: Please provide your **e-mail** address:

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**Background on EuroSSIG**

With more than 5 billion users worldwide, the Internet is the most important infrastructure in the information age. It influences politics, the economy and culture at both the global and the local level. Internet-related topics such as security and stability, freedom of expression, data protection, e-commerce, new market opportunities, protection of intellectual property, infrastructure development, digital divide, net neutrality, Internet of Things, etc. are finding their way onto the national and international political agenda. For some experts, Internet governance will become as important as climate change or energy supply is today. In this respect, there is no doubt that the way in which the Internet is governed, and by whom, is a highly controversial topic in 21st century diplomacy.

In its final report, the UN Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) noted a lack of academic research and teaching on the subject of Internet governance. There was no international academic organisation dealing with Internet governance and no established universities offered comprehensive courses at the master's level.

The academic members of the WGIG, who were also involved in developing the definition of Internet governance, took this as a challenge. They set up a small ad-hoc working group and, together with the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) and the International Communication Association (ICA), which were also supported by UNESCO, prepared an expert meeting in June 2006 in Rathen, Germany. At the meeting in Rathen, several recommendations were discussed, including the establishment of a Global Internet Governance Academic Network (GIGANET) and the introduction of Schools on Internet Governance (SIG).

In July 2007, Medienstadt Leipzig e.V., a German non-profit organisation and an 'At Large Structure' (ALS) recognised under the ICANN bylaws, organised the first European Summer School on Internet Governance (EuroSSIG) in Meißen, Germany. But other than the name suggests it was always a global school with fellows from across the world.

Since then, many regional schools for Internet governance (SIGs) have been created and the concept established worldwide. An IGF Dynamic Coalition was created to cooperate and connect with all SIGs worldwide (see: https://www.igschools.net/sig/).

**Course**

The European Summer School on Internet Governance (EuroSSIG) helps interested students and academics, as well as people working in the private sector or in governments, to better understand the global controversy surrounding Internet governance and to gain comprehensive and structured knowledge about the various aspects of Internet governance.

A one-week academic course, held annually at the end of July, covers the political, legal, economic, socio-cultural, and technological dimensions related to Internet governance.

Each year, the faculty is composed of about 20 experts from different stakeholder groups. It is truly a multi-stakeholder faculty, including representatives from governments, the private sector, civil society and the technical community. The fellows also represent various stakeholder groups from around the world. Fellows are targeted not at undergraduate students, but at individuals who have already started their careers and use the summer school to move into leadership positions.

So far, the concept has worked: more than 500 fellows from around the world have participated in the Meissen School since 2007. Many of them are now involved in national and global Internet governance bodies (including the ICANN and ISOC boards, UN committees and in leading positions in civil society organisations).