

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

The WSIS process has achieved several important milestones. Notably, it reaffirms the original WSIS vision of creating a “people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society”—a framing that remains both relevant and politically significant. At a time when many digital governance efforts, including the UN’s Global Digital Compact, are increasingly state-centric, WSIS has maintained a broader, more inclusive approach that foregrounds development, access, and equity. This commitment to putting people first is a hallmark achievement of the WSIS legacy.

Moreover, the WSIS process has played a meaningful role in narrowing the digital divide, particularly by placing digital inclusion at the heart of global development conversations. While significant gaps in access, skills, and infrastructure remain—especially across the Global South—WSIS has helped elevate these challenges on the international agenda and catalyze efforts to address them. The Zero Draft should continue this legacy by recognizing the structural barriers that still prevent many from fully benefiting from digital transformation. In doing so, it must position WSIS+20 as a vital platform to align digital inclusion strategies with the broader objectives of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda—reinforcing WSIS’s role as a critical bridge between technological progress and human development.

Another key achievement is the continued emphasis on protecting the open, global, and interoperable nature of the Internet. The Zero Draft must acknowledge the risks of fragmentation and the need for coordinated action to address them. However, while this recognition is important, the urgency of the issue demands a bolder stance. Internet fragmentation is no longer an abstract risk—it is an accelerating reality that affects people, businesses, and national economies alike. To build on WSIS’s legacy, the Zero Draft must confront this challenge with clarity and resolve, reaffirming the core principles of openness, trust, and interoperability that underpin a truly inclusive Information Society.

## 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? \*

### Enhanced Cooperation: A Risk of Reopening Old Divides

The Elements paper revisits the issue of “enhanced cooperation”—a topic that has historically been a source of division. Two UN-convened Working Groups on Enhanced Cooperation (WGEC), in 2013 and 2016, were created to explore how governments might contribute more directly to Internet-related public policy. Both efforts failed to achieve consensus, largely due to deep disagreements between those supporting multistakeholder governance and those favoring greater state control. Neither group produced concrete recommendations.

Given this history, it is unclear why reopening this debate now—amid an even more polarized geopolitical landscape—would lead to a different outcome. Without a clear mandate or framework, renewed discussion on enhanced cooperation risks repeating past deadlocks and undermining the collaborative spirit that has defined WSIS.

The Zero Draft should reaffirm the existing definition of enhanced cooperation as articulated in paragraph 69 of the Tunis Agenda:

“We further recognize the need for enhanced cooperation in the future, to enable governments, on an equal footing, to carry out their roles and responsibilities in international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet, but not in the day-to-day technical and operational matters that do not impact on international public policy issues.”

Enhanced cooperation must be understood not as a static destination but as a dynamic, ongoing process—one that is already unfolding across diverse fora and policy domains. To meet the challenges of today’s complex digital landscape, this process must be strengthened and made more inclusive, particularly for governments from the Global Majority, while continuing to reflect the distributed, decentralized nature of the Internet ecosystem.

Crucially, enhanced cooperation and the multistakeholder model are not competing paradigms—they are mutually reinforcing. Effective digital governance depends on the meaningful participation of all stakeholders: governments, civil society, the private sector, the technical and academic communities, and international organizations. Recognizing their respective roles and harnessing their collective expertise is essential to shaping shared, forward-looking policy responses.

To avoid fragmentation and siloed efforts, enhanced cooperation should be better coordinated across existing mechanisms. One such mechanism could be a structured reporting to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) as a means to improve visibility and coherence. At the same time, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) should be more actively leveraged as a platform to surface emerging issues, track progress, and facilitate practical dialogue on the implementation of enhanced cooperation. Together, these steps can help transform what has often been an abstract principle into a concrete driver of inclusive, global digital collaboration.

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 of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society in the context of emerging trends, the following priorities for action could be considered:

- \* Close Digital Divides: Ensure affordable, meaningful connectivity and digital literacy for all, especially in underserved and marginalized communities. Address emerging divides in AI access and data capabilities.
- \* Center Human Rights: Embed international human rights standards in all digital policies. Safeguard freedom of expression, privacy, and protection from surveillance and censorship.
- \* Reinforce Multistakeholder Governance: Uphold and strengthen inclusive, multistakeholder models. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and WSIS platforms must remain open, participatory spaces, particularly for the Global Majority.
- \* Prevent Internet Fragmentation: Take coordinated action to preserve a single, open, and interoperable Internet. Fragmentation poses real risks to economic development, human rights, and innovation.
- \* Leverage Emerging Technologies for Development: Promote ethical, inclusive approaches to AI and digital innovation that support the Sustainable Development Goals and reduce global disparities.
- \* Advance Equitable Data Governance: Develop data policies that respect rights, empower communities, and promote development. Build capacity in low- and middle-income countries to participate in global debates.
- \* Ensure Institutional Accountability: Strengthen review, reporting, and coordination mechanisms through the CSTD. Provide adequate resources and support for long-term implementation.

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

It is essential that the WSIS+20 outcome document remains high-level, principled, and future-oriented—not overly prescriptive or bound to the policy fashions of the moment. The enduring strength of the original WSIS framework lies in its strategic vagueness and normative clarity. Unlike newer processes such as the Global Digital Compact (GDC), which are deeply shaped by current policy crises, WSIS has demonstrated resilience by focusing on broad, foundational principles. It has remained relevant across two decades of profound technological transformation—not despite its generality, but because of it. This is not a weakness; it is a core feature of the WSIS process and a key reason why it continues to serve as a global reference point at the intersection of technology and development.

There is understandable interest in incorporating today’s pressing digital policy concerns—such as digital public infrastructure (DPI), platform accountability, or data governance—into the WSIS+20 framework. These issues are undeniably important, occupying the forefront of national and international policy agendas. However, the rapid evolution of technology means that what is urgent today may be obsolete tomorrow. Locking WSIS into overly specific discussions risks undermining its universality and longevity. The strength of WSIS lies precisely in its capacity to remain adaptable, to evolve alongside technological and societal changes, and to continue serving as a foundational guidepost for inclusive, rights-based digital development.

To that end, the WSIS+20 outcome should avoid being overly detailed or prescriptive on rapidly shifting topics. Instead, it should reaffirm and build upon the pillars that have enabled the WSIS framework to endure: a strong human-centered orientation, a commitment to multistakeholder cooperation, and a clear alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Specifically, the Zero Draft could:

Reassert the importance of human rights in digital governance, including stronger and more explicit references to the role of the UN Human Rights Council in this space.

Emphasize the WSIS framework’s continued relevance to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, with a focus on inclusion, equity, and digital empowerment.

Acknowledge new systemic challenges such as Internet fragmentation and rising notions of digital sovereignty, which threaten the global, interoperable nature of the Internet and require coordinated international responses.

By maintaining a principled yet flexible approach, WSIS can continue to act as a living framework—capable of guiding digital cooperation through future decades, no matter how the technological landscape evolves.

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

The GDC's Shadow Over WSIS

One concern with the Elements Paper is the extent to which it appears to mirror the Global Digital Compact. This reflects a broader fear that the GDC would eclipse the WSIS process rather than be guided by it—a fear that now seems justified. Key sections on issues such as human rights, data governance, and artificial intelligence appear to draw directly from the GDC's language. Even the discussion of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)—a central achievement of WSIS—adopts nearly identical phrasing: "The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) has become an established forum for discussion..."

This is not merely a matter of stylistic repetition. It suggests a deeper shift in influence, where WSIS is no longer setting the tone for digital cooperation but being reshaped in the image of a newer process. That inversion risks marginalizing WSIS's foundational contributions and long-standing multistakeholder legacy.

A Dilution of Human Rights Commitments

Nowhere is this shift more visible than in the treatment of human rights. While the Elements Paper nominally acknowledges the importance of rights protections, it ultimately softens their emphasis. Paragraph 48 states: "International rights agreements permit restrictions on expression... provided that these are relevant, proportionate and established in law." Though technically accurate, this language is frequently used by authoritarian states—including China and Russia—to justify broad restrictions on online freedoms under the guise of "national security."

Moreover, the omission of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the absence of any mention of the UN Human Rights Council's role in digital governance is particularly troubling. For a process rooted in rights-based development, these absences weaken the normative framework and send the wrong signal at a time when digital repression is on the rise.

Lack of Clarity on WSIS–GDC Alignment

The Elements Paper also references the idea of aligning WSIS+20 with the GDC. However, it fails to articulate what such alignment would entail in practice. WSIS has maintained relevance over two decades precisely because of its adaptive and forward-looking nature. The GDC, in contrast, is a more recent initiative with a narrower and more reactive focus on immediate crises.

The CSTD's resolution includes constructive ideas for how the two processes might complement each other, yet the Elements Paper does not engage with these recommendations in a meaningful way. If alignment is to occur, it must strengthen—not dilute—the broader WSIS vision.

Internet Governance: A Regressive Step

The most troubling aspect of the Elements Paper is its framing of Internet governance. Paragraph 59 states: "The governance of the Internet should be multilateral, transparent and democratic, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society and international organisations." While superficially aligned with past commitments, this formulation subtly shifts the emphasis away from multistakeholder participation toward a multilateral, state-led model.

This rhetorical shift departs from the consensus developed through the Tunis Agenda and two decades of inclusive practice. Notably, the document omits the WSIS-agreed working definition of Internet governance: "The development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet." This definition remains highly relevant and should be reinstated in the Zero Draft. It has offered clarity and balance, and it reflects the distributed and collaborative nature of Internet governance.

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

To enhance the effectiveness and coherence of the WSIS architecture, it is essential to more systematically integrate the outputs and insights of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) into the broader WSIS process. The IGF plays a unique role as a multistakeholder platform that identifies emerging issues, facilitates inclusive dialogue, and fosters cross-sector collaboration on digital governance challenges. Its ability to surface new trends and policy gaps—often ahead of formal intergovernmental processes—makes it an indispensable engine of foresight and innovation within the WSIS ecosystem.

To strengthen the WSIS framework, the discussions and outcomes of the IGF should be proactively leveraged by other key components of the architecture, including UN entities, WSIS Action Line facilitators, and relevant stakeholders. Doing so would make IGF outputs more actionable and impactful, supporting the development of informed, consensus-driven approaches to digital policy.

The IGF's annual meetings, intersessional work (such as Best Practice Forums and Dynamic Coalitions), and its network-building functions contribute directly to the evolution of the WSIS Action Lines. These, in turn, feed into the WSIS Forum and are subject to review by the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), ensuring a structured pathway for multistakeholder input to inform intergovernmental processes, including reports to ECOSOC and the UN General Assembly.

Moreover, the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) has a critical role to play in enhancing coordination across the UN system for the effective implementation of the WSIS outcomes. To that end, UNGIS should be further empowered and resourced to act as the central coordinating mechanism that aligns the efforts of UN agencies with the WSIS Action Lines and the broader vision of a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society. By serving as a one-stop shop for tracking implementation, identifying gaps, and promoting synergies between digital development initiatives, UNGIS can help ensure that WSIS remains a coherent, system-wide priority. Moreover, greater visibility and engagement with non-UN stakeholders—through structured multistakeholder complements—would enable UNGIS to act not only as an inter-agency platform, but as a catalyst for cross-sector collaboration in support of WSIS+20 and beyond.

Finally, to foster deeper integration and meaningful enhanced cooperation—particularly for governments from the Global South—each component of the WSIS architecture should establish a dedicated track or space for intergovernmental dialogue. These government-focused tracks would allow states to engage more fully with the WSIS process, articulate their policy priorities, and coordinate more effectively on shared challenges, while remaining embedded within the broader multistakeholder framework. This approach would help ensure that enhanced cooperation does not occur in isolation or in parallel to the multistakeholder model, but as an integrated element of it. By aligning these government tracks with the work of the IGF, the WSIS Forum, UNGIS, and the CSTD, the WSIS architecture would be better positioned to support inclusive, transparent, and coherent digital governance—grounded in both state-level engagement and wider stakeholder participation.

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

The WSIS vision—to build a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society—is not just still relevant; it is more urgent than ever. In an era marked by accelerating technological change and growing geopolitical instability, this vision offers a critical anchor. But preserving it requires more than rhetorical gestures or nostalgic affirmations. It demands political will, long-term thinking, and the courage to defend what has already been achieved.

Today, the open, interoperable, and rights-respecting Internet that WSIS helped shape is under real threat. Fragmentation is no longer a theoretical concern—it is happening in practice, as technical standards, regulatory models, and information flows become increasingly balkanized. Repression is rising, as governments misuse digital tools to silence dissent, monitor citizens, and control narratives. Inequality is deepening, as access to connectivity, data, and emerging technologies remains profoundly uneven across countries and communities.

The answer to these challenges is not to discard or dilute the WSIS framework, but to double down on the principles that made it a global touchstone: a commitment to multistakeholder cooperation, the primacy of universal human rights, and a focus on digital development rooted in equity and inclusion. WSIS endures because it was designed to be adaptable—broad enough to evolve, yet grounded enough to provide direction. Its strength lies not in prescriptive detail, but in its values.

As new initiatives emerge and policy agendas shift, it is crucial that we do not allow WSIS to be sidelined or subordinated. The path forward is not reinvention for its own sake—it is recommitment. Recommitment to inclusive governance. Recommitment to universal rights. Recommitment to the idea that digital transformation must serve people, not power.

WSIS must remain the foundation on which the next phase of global digital cooperation is built. Not as a relic of the past, but as a living framework for a more just and connected future.

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

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

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