

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

As Oxfam, we welcome the mention of the WSIS vision and commitment 'to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society.' We would like to encourage the Co-Facilitators of the WSIS+20 review process to prioritise this commitment by referencing concrete frameworks, guidance and tools developed to support its implementation, and to evaluate and report on its impact. We believe it is critical to show how this commitment has been translated into action and what further needs to be done to ensure digital equality for all.

We also welcome the mention of human rights as pivotal to the WSIS vision. However, at a time when violations and abuses of human rights in the digital context are increasing across the world, we find that the reference to protecting online 'the same rights that people have offline' is too vague and weak. We call the Co-Facilitators to anchor the next phase of the WSIS process in international law, including international human rights law. We further feel it necessary to explicitly spell out what 'online' means and place greater priority on the fundamental rights of racialised, gendered or otherwise vulnerable groups who remain disconnected and thus are not only missing out from the benefits of the Internet but also lack access to basic services and the ability to participate fully in society while also being disproportionately affected by digital harms. For example, the digitalisation of public services like healthcare, education, and finance, among others – accelerated in recent years by the global COVID-19 pandemic – raises numerous questions about access, equity, and privacy. It also threatens to undermine necessary investments in these vital infrastructures – especially in Global Majority countries – by replacing them with digital alternatives from a profit-motivated private sector, sold to governments with the promises of efficiency and cost savings and often without a full assessment of the potential impact on human rights and equity. The rapid rise and evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) likewise heralds entirely novel ways in which society, work, and human life can be further disrupted without adequate care and attention given to these risks, especially for traditionally marginalised and underserved communities. We thus call on the Co-Facilitators to set clear and detailed human rights standards to respond to these concerns, building upon the foundations of General Assembly resolution on the 'Promotion and protection of human rights in the context of digital technologies' (A/RES/78/213) and of General Assembly resolution on 'Seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development' (A/RES/78/265) as well as frameworks like the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. We further recommend recognising the role of the OHCHR and the UN human rights mechanisms as central to Internet and digital policymaking.

Finally, regarding internet governance, Oxfam affirms the critical role of the Internet Governance Forum and supports a renewed commitment to the IGF with broader participation and engagement of stakeholders from Global Majority countries, including civil society organisations and representative groups. The role of national and regional IGF initiatives should be more explicitly acknowledged as a central and essential component of a global multi-stakeholder approach to internet governance informed by the needs and lived experiences of everyday people. However, more clarity is needed on how effective coordination between the WSIS framework and the implementation of the Global Digital Compact will be operationalised to avoid fragmentation, foster synergies, and ensure cohesive, inclusive policymaking. We also recommend recognising the role of the OHCHR and the UN human rights mechanisms as central to Internet and digital policymaking.

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? *

From the perspective of Oxfam as a rights-based organisation focused on fighting extreme poverty and inequality, persistent digital divides are arguably the most important challenges to the achievement of WSIS outcomes to date and in the future. Bridging digital divides requires uninterrupted, meaningful, affordable, and universal access to the internet for all, in a manner that promote equity and well-being rather than adverse integration. We thus encourage the Co-Facilitators to avoid placing too much emphasis on the purely economic potential of digital technologies but also consider the benefits and risks of digital technologies for human rights and robust civic engagement. While expansion and inclusion in the digital economy are indeed essential, economic freedom can only be truly achieved through social and political equality. This should not be treated as optional or secondary in any forward-looking international agreement on the future of WSIS that seeks to improve the lives and wellbeing of all, nor should digital equality be treated as a byproduct solely of economic opportunity. Such neoliberal approaches have proven to be insufficient and unresponsive to the needs of the Global Majority.

Furthermore, the private tech sector's oligopolistic and tax avoidant practices and political capture in industrialised, upper-income countries that exert de facto control over the global digital ecosystem must be given significantly more scrutiny than they are in the Zero Draft. Cooperation and partnership with and funding from the private tech sector are necessary, but so are transparency and accountability. The WSIS+20 review process must not become yet another vehicle for justifying extractive, neo-colonialist elite and private tech sector practices and enrichment; it must prioritise the legitimate power of civil society vis-à-vis human rights and challenge power holders and duty bearers to act accordingly. We therefore request clarification of the role that the private sector will play and what commitments key actors will make (in light of the UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights, among other existing commitments) to ensure the ambitions of WSIS are fully enforceable, transparent and accountable.

Relatedly, the Zero Draft lacks reference to authoritarian regimes and states with poor human rights records – including states that continue to benefit from an unregulated exploitation of digital technologies for surveillance, warfare, and oppression. We call upon the Co-Facilitators to further emphasise the importance of protecting and promoting human rights in the digital world at all times and oppose politically motivated blockages to open, secure, and affordable access to digital technologies, such as internet shutdowns and online mis- and dis-information campaigns, especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

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? *

The first priority is people. In order to place people's needs and rights at the centre of the Information Society, and to create policies that do no harm, it is important to identify who are the people under discussion, what are their particular contexts, concerns and needs, who might be excluded from policies and actions, and how to prevent such harmful outcomes. In an Oxfam partners-led survey with more than 1000 respondents across nine Global South countries, 35% of people reported experiencing digital violence in the past year, with women and girls most affected; 44% were targeted with online intimidation or threats of violence after engaging in activism or human rights advocacy.[1] A majority (66%) also found internet access prohibitively expensive, and less than a third (28%) received training on digital security and digital rights issues like personal data protection. While civil society organisations in the Global South are implementing a range of impactful strategies to help advance digital rights and protections for vulnerable people and those at risk of technology-facilitated abuse, there is still a need for more support to address the growing challenge of digital inequality and for better inclusion of more diverse voices in the shaping of digital policies and practices.

Secondly, the element of an inclusive digital transformation goes hand-in-hand with participation. As Global Partners Digital and other civil society organisations and individual experts have stated many times before [2], this can only be achieved if appropriate participation mechanisms are put in place allowing for all stakeholders and especially underrepresented groups not simply to join but to have an active voice in shaping digital governance. To this end, the 'NETmundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement: Strengthening Internet governance and digital policy', [3] also known as the São Paulo Guidelines, provides concrete suggestions that should be taken up in the next phase of the WSIS process.

Finally, it is important to continue to explicitly link the WSIS framework to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Drawing on the Global Digital Compact's powerful statement of principles and objectives and its connection with the broader vision of the Pact for the Future, the next phase of the WSIS process can help provide a practical framework for utilising the digital transformation to achieve the SDGs without creating new frameworks or duplicating existing efforts.

[1] Summary assessment report available at: <https://www.oxfamrecipe.eu/publications/summary-assessment-report-digital-landscape-threats-and-opportunities>

[2] See for example the Five-Point Plan for an Inclusive WSIS+20 Review, available at: <https://www.gp-digital.org/wsis20-five-point-plan-follow-up-eight-practical-recommendations/>

[3] Available at: <https://netmundial.br/netmundial-10-multistakeholder-statement-strengthening-internet-governance-and-digital-policy-processes>

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

Oxfam supports the Elements Paper's ambitions on financial mechanisms, capacity building and enabling protection against cyber threats but argues that this must include investing in civil society's digital resilience. There are no human rights without safety, and no sustainable development when civil society is digitally vulnerable. It is not enough to fund ad hoc digital literacy trainings. Civil society organisations need holistic digital security support for themselves and the people they serve. Governments, the private sector and donors must cooperate to ensure equitable access to resources for inclusive digital transformation includes funding for civil society organisations, especially those working in the Global South and with Global Majority communities. Such funding should support programmes that equip civil society organisations and people to understand their digital rights and legal frameworks, to support their role in influencing digital policy at different levels and in different contexts while also developing safe digital tools and making the most of the opportunities of the digital transformation.

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

Oxfam wholeheartedly supports the ambition to close the gender digital divide (para 9) and shares the concern with technology-facilitated gender-based violence (para 45). However, we believe that an implicit binary treatment of gender – as in the phrase, ‘the empowerment of women and girls’ – is increasingly antiquated and renders invisible the struggles of marginalised groups throughout the world who identify as gender non-conforming or of diverse sexual orientation (commonly referred to with the acronym SOGIESC in UN-led policy and programming), and who are frequently targeted by anti-rights groups, governments, police, religious extremists, and others with violence, arrest and various other harmful forms of exclusion, both online and offline. This violence and exclusion could be exacerbated by evolving digital technologies if the social, political and economic inequalities currently enabling it are not addressed. On the other hand, these groups stand to benefit greatly from inclusion in the digital transformation, and this ambition should be made explicit along with the prioritised inclusion of women and girls.

Furthermore, we appeal for consistency in the language used to reference to the people facing, or most at risk of, rights violations and harms in the digital age. While the phrases ‘marginalized groups’ and ‘marginalised communities’ (paras 8 and 30) can be defined broadly (and subjectively), some potentially marginalised groups not explicitly mentioned in the Elements Paper are people with diverse SOGIESC, religious minorities, ethnic minorities, and others who may be placed at a disadvantage vis-à-vis digital skills, capacities, and access because of these and other characteristics. Oxfam cannot stress enough that the term ‘human rights’ encompasses all humans, and any UN-led initiative must take that stand explicitly, without ambiguity. We strongly encourage the Co-Facilitators to adopt an intersectional approach that considers how multiple identities and the social and economic context, in addition to the existing state of digital development in a given country, influence experiences, opportunities and outcomes for different groups of people. The ‘Feminist Principles for Gender in the GDC’[4] provide a reference framework to help ensure the next phase of the WSIS process protects, respects and promotes the human rights of all people.

[4] Available at: https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/feminist_principles-gdc-september2023.pdf

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

We call for reinvigorated efforts under the WSIS framework based on international cooperation and collaboration among all relevant stakeholders, including civil society and representative groups from the Global Majority.

We support formal recognition of the role of the OHCHR as an implementing entity by assigning it a role as a co-facilitator of Action Line 10, on Ethics and Human Rights.

We also want to bring attention to the proposals for expanding WSIS Action Lines outlined by the Global Digital Justice Forum.[5]

[5] Available at: https://gdjf.globaldigitaljusticeforum.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Digital_Justice_Now_A_Call_to_Action_for_WSIS20_and_Beyond_v2-1.pdf

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

No

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

Mia Marzotto, Oxfam, civil society

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

Please enter an email