Response from the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) to Revision 2 of the WSIS+20 outcome documents - 10 December 2025

APC commends the co-facilitators and the UN DESA team for another strong draft. We appreciate the efforts that have been made to retain WSIS's core development focus and to ensure a strong commitment to environmental sustainability, human rights, gender equality and the rights of women and girls, and the need for companies to comply with relevant human rights guidelines. There are just a few areas which we feel need fine-tuning. Our comments and proposed text changes follow below, presented in the order of the paragraphs as they currently appear.

Comments on "Closing all digital divides"

The use of global averages to depict expansion in access to the Internet and digital services used in paragraph 19 disguises the massive inequalities that generate those averages. To state that the "proportion of people aged ten and above who own a mobile phone has reached 82 percent globally" when the same source (ITU) states that this figure is only 53% in low income countries with only 23% using the Internet creates a distorted picture that detracts from conveying the scope and scale of the challenge of achieving the WSIS vision. The WSIS outcome document should be drawing attention to the gaps in access, and not to averages which are inflated as a result of people in some parts of the world having not just one mobile device, but several. Similarly, the percentage of people who use the Internet globally might be 74%, but it is only 23% in low income countries.

Percentage of individuals owning a mobile phone and using the Internet, 2025

Region	Mobile phone ownership	Internet use
World	82	74
Africa	66	36
Americas	89	88
Arab States	84	70
Asia-Pacific	82	77
CIS	95	93
Europe	96	92
Low-income	53	23
Lower-middle-income	74	63
Upper-middle-income	90	89
High-income	97	94
LDCs	63	34
LLDCs	64	38
SIDS	74	64
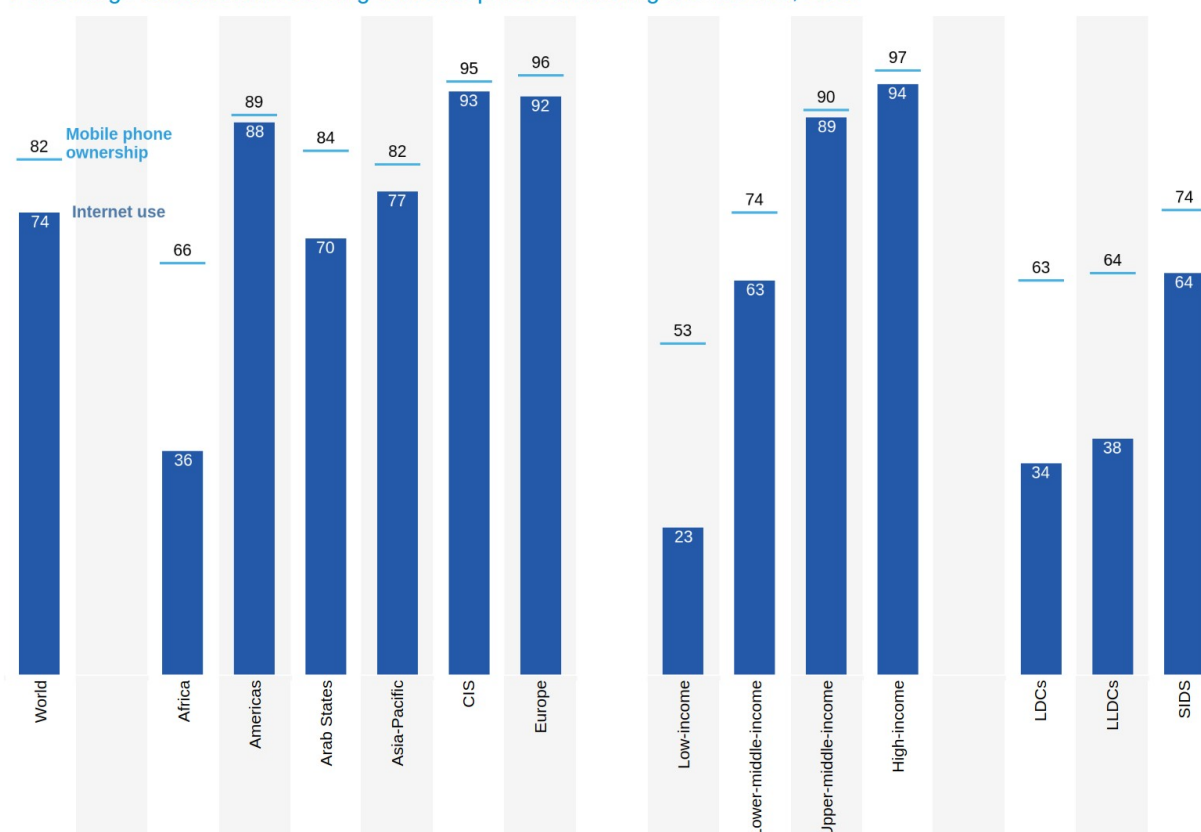
Source: ITU Facts and Figures 2025

We appreciate that paragraphs 20 and 21 draw attention to persistent divides, but a stand-alone paragraph that paints such an overwhelmingly positive picture could be quoted out of context. We propose that the text in paragraph 20 reflecting gaps be combined with paragraph 19. Paragraphs 19, 20 and 21 would then read as follows:

19. We applaud the significant expansion in access to the Internet and digital services achieved
since the World Summit on the Information Society. According to the International Telecommunication Union, more than 93 per cent of the world's population now lives in areas covered by 4G networks. The proportion of people aged ten and above who own a mobile phone has reached 82 per cent globally, while Internet use has risen from just over 15 per cent in 2005 to more than 74 per cent in 2025. However, this figure in high-income countries (94 per cent) is more than four times that in low-income countries (23 per cent), with the proportion below 20 per cent in some countries. The proportion of the population reported by ITU as accessing the Internet in urban areas worldwide is estimated to be almost 85 per cent, while that in rural areas is 58 per cent.

20. We therefore express deep concern, however, about substantial and persistent digital divides between and within regions, countries and communities, which pose particular challenges for developing countries. The proportion of people reported by ITU as using the Internet in high- income countries (94 per cent) is more than four times that in low-income countries (23 per cent), with the proportion below 20 per cent in some countries. The proportion of the population reported by ITU as accessing the Internet in urban areas worldwide is estimated to be almost 85 per cent, while that in rural areas is 58 per cent. [MOVED TO PARA 19]

> 21. We are particularly concerned by persistent gender digital divides. Only 78 per cent of women and girls aged ten and over worldwide are reported by ITU to use a mobile phone compared with 87 per cent of men, while only 71 per cent of women are reported to be using the
> Internet compared with almost 77 per cent of men. Women and girls are also under-represented in education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), employment, entrepreneurship and other areas of digital activity. All stakeholders have a part to play in addressing and rectifying these gender digital divides.

We are very pleased to see that there remains a reference to "community networks" in paragraph 26. We believe however that it might be valuable to broaden this reference to "community-centred connectivity initiatives" so as to encompass a range of initiatives including both not-for-profit, social and small and medium enterprises.

> 26. We are committed to achieving entry-level broadband subscription costs that are accessible and affordable. This will require collaboration among all stakeholders and specifically between private and public sectors, including blended finance as well as innovative mechanisms including universal service funds and community-centered connectivity initiatives such as community networks. We recognize the continued role of public access facilities such as schools, post offices, libraries and hospitals, in making access available, including to those in vulnerable situations."

Comments on "The digital economy"

We urge restoration of text on earlier drafts that refer to 'safeguarding employment rights and welfare' in para 33 of Rev 2. This point has also been made by the Global Digital Justice Forum of which APC is a member.

> 33. We note that digital technologies have had significant impacts on work, including changes in workplace environments and skills requirements, opportunities for more flexible work arrangements and the emergence of digital labour platforms. We note that emerging technologies such as automation, robotics and artificial intelligence are expected to further reshape the labour market, potentially displacing some roles, while also creating new employment opportunities and skill demands. We are determined to ensure that these developments serve to complement and augment human labour, safeguarding employment rights and welfare.

Comments on "Environmental impacts"

We are pleased with the additional text on "e-waste" but we would like to see restoration of the reference to compliance with the Basel Convention in e-waste management in paragraph 44.

> 44. We are further concerned about rapid growth in the volume of electronic waste. The volume of e-waste is growing rapidly, particularly in developing countries, leading to pollution and risks to human health, while rates of collection, recycling and recovery are low. We call on all stakeholders to improve data gathering, facilitate collaboration in safe

> and efficient waste management, including sharing of technology and best practices and ensuring compliance with the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.

Comments on "Financial mechanisms"

APC welcomes the text in Rev 2 that deals with financing and financial mechanisms. In particular, we applaud the mention of a task force on financing digital development in paragraph 66. We do propose some changes to that paragraph and feel some aspects of the text might need further discussion or clarification.

> 66. We invite the Secretary-General, within existing mandates and resources and in coordination with WSIS action lines facilitators and other relevant United Nations entities, to consider the establishment of a task force to map and examine future financial mechanisms for digital development, and propose innovative approaches to addressing gaps, increasing collaboration and building on and complementing ongoing financing initiatives and mechanisms,   and involving all stakeholders, including multilateral financial institutions and other development partners. It should meet alongside existing convenings of the Commission for Science and Technology for Development, the Internet Governance Forum and the WSIS Forum, and to report on its outcomes to the 81st 82nd session of the General Assembly in 202 76.

Comments on "Human rights and ethical dimensions of the Information Society"

We value the effort that has gone into maintaining a strong rights-focus throughout the document. Nevertheless we endorse comments on this section made by the Global Digital Justice Forum, the Global Digital Rights Coalition, Article 19 and the Global Forum for Media Development.

We realise it has not been mentioned explicitly but we remind States and other stakeholders that iit would be helpful and be consistent with the WSIS principles to add text to recognise the value of the UN's Human Rights-Based Approach to Development to WSIS implementation. This approach is development oriented, integrates compliance with both social and economic and civil and political rights, and is fundamentally rooted in the principle or participation of all affected individuals, communities and stakeholders.

Comments on "Internet governance"

The current section on Internet Governance in Rev2 implies that the governance of the Internet is limited to technical issues and therefore does not reflect the Tunis Agenda definition and description of Internet governance, nor the current scope of topics discussed at the IGF. The misconception that Internet governance does not encompass both technical and policy issues has to be corrected, in line with the definition of internet governance in paragraph 34 and further elaboration in paragraph 35 of the Tunis Agenda. APC endorses the changes proposed by Markus Kummer and IT for Change (for the Global Digital Justice Forum) in this regard. Based on their submissions we propose the following changes.

88. We reaffirm the working definition of Internet governance in the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society as 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.

89. We ~~recognize~~ reaffirm that Internet governance encompasses both technical and public policy issues and must continue to be global, transparent, democratic and multistakeholder in nature with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society, technical and academic communities, international organisations, and all other relevant stakeholders in accordance with their respective roles and responsibilities. We reaffirm that effective Internet governance must preserve the open, free, global, interoperable, reliable and secure nature of the Internet, and reject models of state-controlled or fragmented Internet architectures.

Comments on "The development of the WSIS framework."

As the document reads at present the IGF is not explicitly reflected as part of the WSIS framework. It is important to reference the IGF beyond the section on internet governance. We propose that both the IGF and the WSIS Forum are mentioned in paragraph 107.

107. We welcome the efforts of United Nations entities and World Summit Action Line facilitators to support the implementation of WSIS outcomes over the past two decades within their mandates and areas of responsibility. We commend the International Telecommunication Union on its establishment of the WSIS Stocktaking Platform and the WSIS Prizes, and encourage all stakeholders to contribute to the Stocktaking database. We look forward to the continuation of the WSIS Forum and the Internet Governance Forum as complementary but distinct platforms for multistakeholder public participation in WSIS implementation and Internet and digital governance.