Written inputs to the WSIS+20 Zero Draft

Submission by the Eastern & North Eastern Himalayan Region Network (eNorth East Network), Council for Social and Digital Development (CSDD), and the North East Development Foundation (NEDF)

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Based on the Zero Draft document, the following are key inputs for the specified sections, interpreted for tribes, indigenous, and mountain communities in the Himalayan regions, and in the context of climate change, natural disasters, and ethnic conflicts.

1. **Bridging Digital Divides**
   o The Zero Draft should recognise that for Himalayan, Mountain, Hilly, Tribal and Indigenous communities, a significant digital divide and requires reliable, meaningful, robust network and access, and greater digital inclusion efforts.
   o The Zero Draft should acknowledge the specific information society needs and challenges of the mountain, hilly and Himalayan communities, although it acknowledges that Indigenous Peoples are under-represented online, and commits to achieving universal, meaningful, and affordable access to the internet.

2. **The Digital Economy**
   o It is necessary to recognise the needs of the Nano, Rural, Women, Indigenous, Tribal entrepreneurs, residing in traditional clusters to ensure benefits of digital economy reaches and extends to this vast majority of struggling and vulnerable enterprises, especially in a post Covid pandemic emergence.
   o This is a concern for isolated communities in the Mountain, Hilly, Indigenous, Rural, Tribal regions and Himalayas, where the support systems, capacities, resources are limited and difficult to join mainstream digital economy.

3. **Environmental Impacts**
   o There are silent and hidden concerns about the environmental footprint of digital technologies, e-wastes and including growing energy consumption from data centers and AI in the mountain, hilly and Himalayan communities and regions.
   o Promoting sustainable production, consumption is the key including circular economy based sustainable practices, including reuse, repair, and recycling, in these regions.

4. **The Enabling Environment for Digital Development**
   o For Hilly, Mountain and Himalayan communities, the threats of an enabling environment are emerging from climate change, natural disasters posing threat to digital infrastructure, reliability, safety and sustainability of networks and access.
   o The power / electricity deficits are widening to support rapid information societies in these regions.
   o The Zero Draft should stress the need for frameworks that support sustainable innovations and solutions adapted to their unique needs and geographical constraints.

5. **Building Confidence and Security in ICTs**
   o Unreliable connectivity, ethnic conflicts, shutdowns, poor digital inclusion and access, lack of adequate ICT skills and capacities are highlights of mountain, hilly and Himalayan communities.
   o Natural disasters, climate change impacts are adding newer challenges to confidence and security in ICTs for the people of these regions.
   o The Zero Draft should recognise and highlight these specific gap areas in these regions and communities.

6. **Financial Mechanisms**
   o The Zero Draft should lay greater focus on public funding and alternative financial models, like universal service funds and community networks, to ensure tribal, indigenous, mountain, Himalayan regions aren't left behind as they are commercially not viable.
   o It should recognise the need for increased funding and capacity-building, particularly for national statistical systems and for developing digital skills in these regions.
   o It should explicitly acknowledge that local innovators and entrepreneurs in indigenous, hilly, mountain, and tribal communities face significant barriers in securing financial support with the need for specific financial mechanisms.

7. **Data Governance & & Artificial Intelligence**
   o A key gap is the lack of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, where data about these communities is often managed by external entities rather than the communities themselves.
   o The Zero Draft should emphasize the right of these groups to govern their own data, ensuring that collection, ownership, and use align with their cultural values and needs.
   o The Zero Draft should recognize the active participation of these communities in the design and governance of AI to ensure it serves their specific needs and avoids the risk of "digital colonialism".
   o The Zero Draft needs to address the unequal access to AI capacity and infrastructure in these regions. It should specifically call for a focus on building local, sustainable AI talent and infrastructure, rather than relying on external solutions.

8. **Internet Governance**

o The Zero draft should recognize the need for active and effective participation of the tribal, indigenous, hilly, mountain communities in global internet governance discussions due to their acute under-representation. Their voices are not fully heard in shaping policies, rules, and standards, leading to decisions that may not be relevant to their unique needs or challenges.

o The draft must acknowledge the need to promote and protect linguistic and cultural diversity on the internet and to create local, relevant content in indigenous languages.

o While the Zero Draft mentions multi-stakeholder cooperation, it does not explicitly highlight the importance of community-led networks and governance models for providing sustainable and affordable internet access.

o The Zero Draft should recognise the acute Internet Governance challenges in these regions and communities, particularly during times of ethnic conflicts or political turmoil. Localising Internet Governance bottom up should be prioritised.