Subject:	Written Inputs from Digital Empowerment Foundation, India for the WSIS +20 Draft Review

Dear UN Secretariat,

Kindly note the written inputs from [Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF)](#), India for the [WSIS+20 Zero Draft Review](#):

1. Affordability & Devices

Zero Draft Point Nos. 28–29: universal meaningful and affordable access, entry-level broadband subscription costs.

DEF Feedback: Beyond broadband tariffs, the affordability of devices remains the biggest barrier in rural India. DEF's surveys show many households share a single basic smartphone, limiting women's and children's access. We recommend adding device affordability targets (≤20% of monthly GNI per capita) and mandating public access points in libraries, schools, health centres, and panchayats to ensure shared, equitable access in rural communities.

2. Community Networks & Universal Service Funds

Zero Draft Point No. 32: financing mechanisms and incentives to connect the unconnected.

Zero Draft Point No. 76: role of universal access funds and community networks.

DEF Feedback: DEF has seeded over 200 community networks across rural and tribal India, demonstrating that cooperatives, women's collectives, and SMEs can deliver last-mile connectivity where telcos will not. Yet India's Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) remains underutilised and urban-biased. We urge the draft to explicitly recognise community-led connectivity and earmark ≥50% of USF resources for rural last-mile access, with transparent reporting and civil society oversight.

3. Local Content & Language Equity

Zero Draft Point No. 30: multilingual content and internationalised domain names.

DEF Feedback: DEF's grassroots work shows rural users often lack meaningful content in local languages or interfaces designed for low literacy. We recommend establishing a Local Content Facility with measurable language targets (e.g., 100 underserved languages by 2030) and funding for voice-based and visual content that meets the needs of non-literate and first-generation Internet users.

4. Rural Digital Intermediaries & Skills

Zero Draft Point Nos. 66–70: capacity development, digital literacy, skills, and lifelong learning.

DEF Feedback: [DEF's *SoochnaPreneurs*](#) — women, disabled and youth trained as rural infopreneurs, running 2000+ Communication Information Resource Centers (CIRCs), show how hyperlocal digital intermediaries can deliver services and livelihoods. We urge explicit recognition of rural intermediaries in the draft, linking digital skilling programmes to employment and community service delivery, not just basic literacy.

5. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

Zero Draft Point No. 20: digital public goods and digital public infrastructure as enablers of transformation.

DEF Feedback: While India's Aadhaar and UPI showcase the promise of DPI, DEF's research reveals risks of exclusion, fraud, and lack of grievance redress in rural areas. We recommend safeguards in the draft: open standards, offline/low-bandwidth functionality, grievance mechanisms, and inclusive onboarding for rural, disabled, and queer/trans users.

6. Disability Inclusion

Zero Draft Point Nos. 10, 14, 25: disability rights recognised but no operational commitments.

DEF Feedback: DEF's centres observe that persons with disabilities are excluded due to lack of assistive technologies and inaccessible platforms. The draft must commit to accessibility-by-design (WCAG compliance), public investment in affordable assistive devices, targeted skilling for disabled youth, and disability-disaggregated indicators to track progress.

7. Queer & Transgender Inclusion

Zero Draft Point Nos. 13–14, 64: focus on women/girls, gender-based violence, and marginalised groups, but omit LGBTQI+ people.

DEF Feedback: DEF's advocacy shows that transgender and queer persons face digital harassment, exclusion from ID-linked services, and invisibility in policy. The draft should explicitly include queer and transgender digital inclusion, ensuring their rights, safety, and participation in governance spaces.

8. Smart Villages

Zero Draft Point Nos. 41–48: ICTs for social and economic development (education, health, culture).

DEF Feedback: DEF's Smart Village model integrates connectivity, renewable energy, local entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and community services. This decentralised, hyperlocal, self-sustainable ecosystem reduces distress migration and fosters climate-resilient growth. We recommend explicit recognition of Smart Villages as a rural development strategy.

9. Platform Fairness for MSMEs

Zero Draft Point Nos. 33–38: digital economy, MSMEs, e-commerce.

DEF Feedback: DEF's digital livelihood programmes with rural artisans reveal exploitative platform practices — opaque rankings, high commissions, and lack of interoperability. The draft should commit to

fair platform practices, capped fees for nano-enterprises, interoperable payment systems, and access to cross-border e-commerce for rural MSMEs.

10. Rights & Participation

Zero Draft Point Nos. 88–90: human rights online, privacy, surveillance, media independence.

DEF Feedback: DEF has documented the chilling effects of Internet shutdowns in rural India on education, health, and livelihoods. We urge the draft to explicitly condemn shutdowns, regulate spyware under international law, and create a Global Participation Facility to enable rural, disabled, queer, and Indigenous voices to engage in WSIS and IGF processes.

11. Environmental Justice & Data Centres

Zero Draft Point Nos. 49–54: ICTs for sustainability, energy use, rare minerals, e-waste.

Zero Draft Point No. 50: mentions data centres' energy consumption only.

DEF Feedback: DEF's rural fieldwork shows how e-waste dumping and extractive projects impact communities. We urge inclusion of land, water, and community impacts of data centres; Big Tech accountability for regulatory compliance on land rights, water usage, and emissions; promotion of decentralised, renewable-powered data centres; and strong enforcement of Right-to-Repair and e-waste bans in the Global South.

12. Monitoring & Measurement

Zero Draft Point Nos. 132–138: ICT indicators, Partnership on Measuring ICT, disaggregated data.

DEF Feedback: Rural realities are invisible in national averages. DEF calls for disaggregated data (rural/urban, gender, disability, income, SOGI) and adoption of meaningful connectivity metrics (speed, latency, device ownership, actual meaningful use). Affordability baskets should be published annually to monitor progress.

Warm regards,

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