

WSIS+20 Consultation Input

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Introduction

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the WSIS+20 consultations and commend the Co-Facilitators and UN DESA for leading this important process in such a transparent and inclusive way.

Over the past two decades, the WSIS process has been central to shaping the Information Society: setting norms, establishing multistakeholder forums, and embedding the values of openness, inclusion, and human rights. As we approach WSIS+20, the *Zero Draft* reflects significant progress in modernizing this framework for today's digital reality. At the same time, it reveals gaps that must be addressed if commitments are to move beyond aspiration toward concrete implementation.

Strengths of the Zero Draft

1. Human Rights at the Core

The *Zero Draft* anchors WSIS implementation in a human rights framework, explicitly referencing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The inclusion of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the call for private actors to align with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights is also welcome. Such commitments are essential given the rise of digital authoritarianism, pervasive surveillance, and disinformation.

2. Anti-Fragmentation / Open Internet Principles

The *Zero Draft* reaffirms opposition to state-controlled or fragmented internet architectures ("splinternets"), upholding openness, global interoperability, and inclusive Internet governance.

3. Institutional Upgrades: Metrics, Roadmaps, Permanence

- WSIS Action Lines are no longer aspirational; the *Zero Draft* introduces metrics, indicators, and time-bound roadmaps, with reporting expected by 2027.
- The recommendation for the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to be made permanent, with stronger secretariat support and broader participation from developing countries is welcome and consistent with stakeholder input from across the board.
- Links between WSIS Action Lines, the SDGs, and the Global Digital Compact (GDC) are formalized, embedding WSIS reviews into ECOSOC, CSTD, and other processes.

4. Support for Global South Capacity Building

Proposals for AI research hubs, fellowships, and related initiatives acknowledge the urgent need to address technology gaps and uneven capacities across regions.

5. A Holistic Approach to Digital Equity

Digital equity is rightly recognized as extending beyond infrastructure to include affordability, digital literacy, local content, governance capacity, and public trust.

Key Gaps: What Is Still Missing

1. Weak or Unspecified Financing Mechanisms

- While the *Zero Draft* introduces metrics and roadmaps, it lacks concrete proposals on financing. No binding commitments are sought from development banks, donor agencies, or “innovative finance” instruments.
- Financing efforts remain fragmented, with infrastructure projects often separated from skills, governance, and content development.

2. Overlapping Mandates Among WSIS, GDC, and Other Forums

Risks of duplication or competition exist between WSIS, the GDC, ECOSOC/CSTD, and the IGF. The division of labor remains unclear.

3. Limited Integration of IGF Outputs into Decision-Making

While permanence is welcome, IGF discussions risk remaining peripheral unless systematically linked to intergovernmental decision-making. Strengthening local and regional IGFs and using the global one to deepen coordination could address this.

4. Lack of Concrete Anti-Fragmentation Tools

Principles alone are insufficient; specific policy instruments are needed, such as interoperability standards, cross-border data safeguards, and frameworks for secure data flows.

5. Weak Accountability, Monitoring, and Transparency

While the *Zero Draft* proposes reporting mechanisms, independent oversight and real-time monitoring systems remain underdeveloped, weakening the link between commitments and outcomes.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Zero Draft and WSIS+20 Outcomes

To ensure WSIS+20 delivers meaningful and measurable progress, we recommend:

1. Establishing a WSIS+20 Task Force on Digital Financing

- A dedicated Task Force embedded in the WSIS+20 process, comprising UN agencies, development banks, the private sector, philanthropic actors, and civil society.
- Mandate: map existing financing, identify gaps, propose innovative/blended finance instruments, and monitor implementation.

2. Defining Clear and Binding Financing Commitments

- Secure commitments from governments, development banks, and donors for specific funding volumes and timelines, with transparent reporting requirements.
- Encourage the use of universal service funds, global solidarity funds, and digital service levies to support under-served regions.

3. Clarifying Enhanced Cooperation with Accountability

- Leverage existing mechanisms rather than creating new ones.
- Provide governments with structured spaces for discussing Internet public policy issues, informed by multistakeholder input.

4. Demarcating Responsibilities Among WSIS, GDC, ECOSOC, and IGF

- Establish a clear task matrix to prevent overlap, ensuring IGF outputs feed effectively into negotiations and policymaking processes.

5. Strengthening IGF's Influence

- Ensure IGF outcomes inform public policy deliberations.
- Support regional and national IGFs and adequately resource the IGF Secretariat.

6. Implementing Concrete Anti-Fragmentation Instruments

- Develop standards for interoperability, cross-border data flows, and safeguards against excessive data localization or Internet fragmentation.

7. Embedding Robust Monitoring, Transparency, and Accountability Mechanisms

- Create public dashboards to track commitments versus outcomes in real time.
- Conduct independent evaluations by civil society or third-party experts.
- Require clear timelines, milestones, and reporting obligations for all actors.

8. Advancing Holistic Digital Equity and Inclusion

- Support digital literacy, local content creation, policy frameworks, and online trust and safety initiatives.
- Provide resources for Global South capacity building to design and implement sustainable digital projects.

9. Ensuring a Sustainable, Multi-Source Financing Ecosystem

- Blend public, private, and philanthropic finance while avoiding overreliance on a single source.
- Establish regional hubs to adapt financing strategies to local realities.

Conclusion

The *Zero Draft* represents a step forward, particularly in its emphasis on human rights, institutional permanence, metrics, and core digital principles. However, without concrete financing commitments, operational clarity, accountability frameworks, and actionable anti-fragmentation tools, its ambitions risk remaining aspirational.

To make WSIS+20 a true turning point, commitments must be matched by resources, oversight, and inclusive decision-making. A Digital Financing Task Force, strengthened enhanced cooperation, a more impactful IGF, and actionable anti-fragmentation measures are key steps toward achieving this goal.