

## Consultation

### World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)+20 Zero Draft

19 September 2025

We thank the co-facilitators for the opportunity to provide our input to the WSIS+20 review. Here, we would like to share our assessment of the zero draft. We focus especially on its relevance to digital public goods and open source software, as well as the role of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), human rights and sustainability.

The Open Knowledge Foundation Germany is a non-profit association based in Berlin that has been promoting free, open knowledge and democratic participation since its founding in 2011. To this end, we develop technologies and tools that strengthen civil society. Since 2011, we have been supporting citizens in exercising their right to access information from German authorities through the online transparency platform *FragDenStaat*. With our grantmaking program *PrototypeFund*, we support innovative open source software ideas. In addition, in our longstanding engagement for youth digital literacy (*Jugend hackt*), we work together with young people to develop technical skills and encourage them to use these skills for socially beneficial ends. We combine practical projects with policy work to advance a digital transformation to create a democratic, sustainable and resilient future.

#### **Human rights protections must be maintained and operationalized through concrete mechanisms.**

The zero draft contains robust human rights language, largely reaffirming existing United Nations language. While the reaffirmation of existing commitments is essential, three elements are particularly crucial and represent important advances.

First, the inclusion of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the facilitation and assessment of all Action Lines represents a significant step towards integrating human rights across all aspects of WSIS implementation.

Second, the explicit call to refrain from Internet shutdowns, arbitrary surveillance, and online censorship as direct limitations of the ability of individuals to make meaningful use of the Internet in paragraph 88 is an important clarification of paragraph 29(d) of the Global Digital Compact.

Third, the provision for effective redress against surveillance measures represents a vital addition to paragraph 31(d) of the Global Digital Compact, establishing accountability mechanisms that have long been absent from digital governance frameworks. These crucial improvements should be kept.

#### **Market concentration must be recognized as a fundamental barrier to inclusive digital development.**

The zero draft contains a welcome reference to the need to tackle “concentrations of technological capacity and market power” (paragraph 35). However, the issue supersedes its relevance to digital economy, the chapter the paragraph is included in. The [UN CSTD's report on progress in twenty-years of WSIS](#) identifies "the growing concentration of economic and decision-making power" (p. 109) as one of the central challenges since WSIS, noting that the United States of America and China account for half of global hyperscale data centers and 94% of funding for startups in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This dominance also translates into control over infrastructure, the report notes, especially, as the requirements capital investments for viable enterprises grow (p. 53).

This market dominance acts as a systematic barrier to human rights and sustainable development. The concentrated control over digital infrastructure enables a few companies to effectively determine the conditions under which billions of people can participate in digital society. The resulting harm is concrete and measurable and includes, among others persistent privacy violations through unchecked data monetization; discriminatory treatment of users in developing countries through insufficient moderation efforts; and the exploitation of data workers in the Global South in the training and development of generative AI.

The paragraph should thus be moved to the chapter on information and communications technology (ICTs) for development. The reference to market concentrations could follow paragraph 18 on persistent digital divides and inequalities. It should explicitly mention that digital inequalities have become entrenched in dynamics of market concentration and technological capacity and that these concentrations have been one of the main hindrances in the realization of sustainable and inclusive development.

**Digital public goods help address market concentration and achieve sustainable development. As such, they must be positioned as fundamental to achieving WSIS objectives.**

Following from the above discussion of market concentration, Digital Public Goods should assume a more central role in the zero draft. Digital Public Goods, as defined by the United Nations, do not only follow open norms but include the requirement to follow privacy standards and to do no harm. As such, they are central to achieving the WSIS goals. To strengthen their role in the achievement of the WSIS action lines, paragraph 20 should recognize this role and connect Digital Public Goods to the central goal of tackling concentrations in market power and technological capacity.

As the CSTD report emphasises, achieving WSIS goals requires "greater policy coherence at national level, developing holistic strategies for the achievement of WSIS goals and SDGs that bring together digital and non-digital stakeholders within and beyond government, including the pursuit of digital public infrastructure and digital public goods" (p. 128).

Digital Public Goods directly address multiple WSIS challenges: they counter market concentration by providing alternatives to closed and proprietary systems; they enable local adaptation and innovation;

they prevent arbitrary surveillance through the requirement of the *Do No Harm* principle and through transparency and community oversight; and they foster genuine capacity building by enabling local expertise development. The outcome document should explicitly connect Digital Public Goods to these various dimensions of digital development, positioning them not as one option among many, but as essential infrastructure for an inclusive Information Society.

We recommend that the final document include specific commitments to support initiatives like the Digital Public Goods Alliance, which facilitates international cooperation on open source software development and deployment. Furthermore, Action Line facilitators should be mandated to prioritize Digital Public Goods approaches in their implementation roadmaps, with specific targets for adoption and support of open technologies across all relevant sectors.

**The Internet Governance Forum requires stronger affirmation as the primary multistakeholder platform.**

While we strongly support the decision to make the IGF permanent, the current language in paragraph 112 describing the IGF as a "unique platform for multistakeholder discussion" falls short of existing approved United Nations language. This should be aligned with the language in paragraph 28 of the Global Digital Compact, which acknowledges the IGF as "the primary multi-stakeholder platform for discussion of Internet governance issues". This distinction is crucial to ensure the future relevance of the IGF and avoid duplication with other platforms.

The permanence of the IGF should not merely ensure continuation of current practices but must include a commitment to ongoing evolution and reform. We support the paragraphs addressing increased inclusivity of the Forum. Additionally, the text should acknowledge IGF's evolution to address emerging topics such as artificial intelligence governance, which falls within the broad definition of internet governance established in the Tunis Agenda. Affirming the IGF as the primary forum while emphasizing the comprehensive scope of internet governance will help safeguard its central role in the evolving digital landscape.

**Environmental sustainability provisions represent welcome progress that must be preserved.**

The zero draft's treatment of environmental impacts represents significant evolution in United Nations digital governance discourse. The recognition of growing energy consumption from digitization, the environmental costs of data centers and AI development, and concerns about e-waste and resource extraction reflect a matured understanding of digital sustainability challenges. The call for global reporting standards on environmental impacts and cooperation among all stakeholders represents concrete progress beyond previous outcomes. These provisions should be maintained and potentially strengthened with specific targets and timelines for implementation.

**The inclusive preparatory process has yielded substantial improvements and should continue through the final negotiations.**

The process thus far has been inclusive, leading to significant improvements between the elements paper and zero draft. We commend the co-facilitators for their responsiveness to stakeholder input, particularly in incorporating suggestions from the IGF community. The draft now properly acknowledges all stakeholder groups, including the technical community, and the vital role of intersessional activities and National and Regional Internet Governance Forums. We urge the co-facilitators to maintain this inclusive approach through the later stages of negotiations.

Multistakeholder participation remains at the core of the WSIS architecture and must continue to be central in the review process. While we appreciate that the preparatory process roadmap includes consultations for November, we encourage the co-facilitators to ensure these consultations are conducted in a hybrid format, enabling participation from stakeholders unable to travel to New York. Furthermore, to maintain transparency and enable all stakeholders to follow the evolution of the text, we request that subsequent drafts be made publicly available during the November and December negotiations.

Learning from the demonstrated benefits of multistakeholder inclusion in the WSIS+20 review process, we recommend that the outcome document explicitly references the [São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines](#). The guidelines provide a comprehensive framework for meaningful multistakeholder participation in Internet governance and digital policy processes. The decision to make the IGF permanent and to integrate the Global Digital Compact commitments into the WSIS action lines ensures a future relevance for the WSIS architecture. This decision should also warrant practical reforms towards more inclusion. A reference to the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines would provide a clear anchor for these reform efforts.

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