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TGI's Feedback on WSIS+20 Zero Draft

The WSIS+20 Zero Draft provides a valuable foundation for advancing a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented information society. It highlights the importance of human rights, inclusion, and sustainable development, and we particularly welcome the strong human rights language, the recognition of vulnerable groups including women, indigenous communities, and youth, and the references to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and gender mainstreaming across action lines. These inclusions represent genuine progress and should be defended during the negotiations.

At the same time, the draft leaves important gaps, especially in areas of accountability, digital divides, governance, financing, and sustainability. The following priority areas outline where the draft should be reinforced.

1. Tone & Framing
The Zero Draft takes a largely celebratory tone toward digital progress, which risks downplaying the associated risks and inequalities. The draft would be stronger if it adopted a more balanced perspective that consistently foregrounds rights. Greater caution and grounding would also help ensure accountability, equity, and inclusion.

2. Human Rights & Accountability
The inclusion of human rights safeguards and a rights-enabling approach in the Zero Draft is one of its strongest features and should be preserved. However, the text falls short in addressing accountability. Specifically, it does not establish private sector liability for violations of human rights, despite the growing influence of dominant technology companies in shaping digital spaces. This omission risks undermining the effectiveness of safeguards already in place. To strengthen the draft, negotiators should advocate for explicit provisions that assign liability to the private sector, backed by mechanisms for redress and accountability. This would ensure that corporations play their part in upholding international standards and protecting users.

3. Inclusion & Digital Divides
Although the draft pays attention to connectivity, it overlooks deeper structural divides such as unequal access to data, the skills needed to make use of digital technologies, and the capacity to participate meaningfully in digital spaces. Connectivity alone does not guarantee empowerment. Equally, communication rights and democratic participation in digital platforms are not sufficiently addressed, despite their central role in protecting democratic space. To improve this, the draft should broaden its focus beyond physical connectivity to include the data divide, digital

literacy, and measures to safeguard communication rights. This will ensure that digital inclusion supports democratic resilience as well as access to services.

4. Internet Governance & Multistakeholder Principles

The draft references existing Internet governance frameworks but offers little operational clarity about how they should evolve. In its current form, it risks narrowing the understanding of Internet governance by emphasizing older frameworks without recognizing recent developments. The final text should explicitly strengthen multistakeholder engagement, ensuring that civil society, marginalized communities, and the private sector have meaningful roles in decision-making. It should also clarify the operationalization of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the WSIS governance structures, including regular review mechanisms and integration with the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) and other UN processes. This will enhance coherence, inclusivity, and accountability in global digital governance.

5. Digital Economy & Financing

The draft leans heavily on private investment without clear mechanisms for public financing or safeguards to ensure equitable benefits. To address this, the draft should establish clear financing mechanisms that balance public and private contributions. It should also explore innovative approaches such as a digital development tax or compulsory contributions from dominant Internet companies to fund infrastructure in underserved areas. Finally, the operationalization of digital public infrastructure and goods should be directly tied to human rights protections and sustainable development outcomes, to ensure that digital investments benefit the many rather than the few.

6. Environmental Sustainability

While environmental concerns are mentioned in the Zero Draft, the links between technology choices and sustainability outcomes are not fully developed. Digital technologies can either reinforce harmful extractive practices or enable just and sustainable transitions, depending on how they are designed and deployed. The draft should explicitly integrate sustainability into the procurement, design, and use of digital technologies, encouraging approaches that minimize environmental harm and support global sustainability goals. This would align the digital agenda more closely with the urgent need for climate and environmental action.

Conclusion

The WSIS+20 Zero Draft offers a strong starting point, particularly in the areas of human rights and inclusion. Yet to fulfill its potential, it must grapple with the hard questions of accountability, financing, governance, and sustainability. Strengthening provisions on private sector liability, expanding the concept of inclusion beyond connectivity, ensuring robust multistakeholder governance, introducing fair financing mechanisms, and embedding sustainability into digital

strategies will make the Zero Draft more credible and actionable. These priorities should guide the negotiations to ensure the final outcome delivers a truly inclusive and equitable digital future.

About Tech Global Institute

Tech Global Institute is a digital rights nonprofit headquartered in Ontario with a mission to advance equity of communities in the Global Majority on the Internet. Through evidence-based research, policy advocacy, and South-South coalition-building, we aim to strengthen design and governance accountability of technologies that have an impact on underserved communities, and amplify marginalized voices and realities in policy decision-making at a global level. More information about us can be found on our website: www.techglobalinstitute.com