WSIS+20 ZERO DRAFT – UN Women comments

Twenty years of WSIS implementation have demonstrated that gender equality is not peripheral to the WSIS vision but fundamental to its realization. This draft rightly acknowledges that the gender digital divide is a persistent problem requiring action and makes important symbolic and normative recognitions. It is important, in its finalization, to ensure that it also addresses the gaps which have hindered progress in recent years by:
- Ensuring systematic gender mainstreaming across all Action Lines and emerging issues, so that no area remains gender-blind;
- Including clear, measurable commitments, beyond aspirational language;
- Establishing robust accountability and monitoring mechanisms to track progress and impact.

Information and communications technologies for development

Para 18

We are deeply concerned, however, that the capacity of these technologies to support development remains constrained by digital divides and inequalities between and within countries, regions and communities. A third of the world's population still does not make use of the Internet, **disproportionately women and girls**, while many people with access make little use of it for reasons that include lack of affordability, **safety**, limited content including content in locally relevant languages, and limited digital skills. Strengthened international cooperation and enabling policy environments are required to address gaps in access and affordability, digital skills, financing and technological resources.

Para 20

We acknowledge that developing digital public goods and digital public infrastructure are critical drivers of inclusive digital transformation and innovation and recognise the need to increase investment in their successful development with the **meaningful** participation of all stakeholders. Digital public goods include open-source software, open data, open artificial intelligence models, open standards and open content that adhere to privacy and other applicable international laws, standards and best practices and do no harm, empower societies and individuals to direct digital technologies to their development needs and can facilitate digital cooperation and investment. Resilient, safe, inclusive and interoperable digital public infrastructure has the potential to deliver services at scale and increase social and economic opportunities for all. We recognise that there are multiple models of digital public infrastructure, and we recognise that each society will develop and use shared digital systems according to its particular priorities and needs, **with safeguards to prevent exclusion and eliminate the specific barriers faced by women and girls and people with limited literacy, accessibility or in vulnerable situations.**

Bridging digital divides

Para 24

We are particularly concerned by persistent gender digital divides. Only 77 per cent of women aged ten and over worldwide use a mobile phone compared with 82 per cent of men, while only 65 per cent of women are using the Internet compared with almost 70 per cent of men. Women and girls are also under-represented in education, employment and other areas of digital activity. All stakeholders have **a responsibility to address and close** these gender digital divides, **through mainstreaming gender perspectives in digital strategies with concrete targets, adequate resources and clear accountability mechanisms.**

The digital economy

Para 36

We note that financial services have evolved rapidly to take advantage of the capabilities of digital transactions, and that Internet banking, cashless payments and mobile money systems have changed the ways in which many businesses and customers now interact, increasing ease of access to financial services for many who were previously excluded. We will support developing countries, in line with their national circumstances and priorities, in creating enabling domestic environments for development of digital financial services for all **designed to avoid perpetuating or creating new forms of exclusion.**

Para 40

We note that digital technologies have had significant impacts on employment, **with differentiated effects on women and men**, including changes in workplace environments and training requirements, opportunities for more flexible working and the emergence of digital labour platforms. **We further note** that automation, robotics and artificial intelligence are expected to have further substantial impacts on employment opportunities, including the displacement of some professional, clerical and manual types of work, **while women remain underrepresented in the digital economy and concentrated in sectors most vulnerable to automation.**

Social and economic development

Pra 42

We recognise that information and communications technologies have fundamentally impacted the ways in which individuals and communities interact, consume and spend their time. While many of these impacts have been positive, others have raised concerns, including for human rights, health, employment and the welfare, **safety and equal participation of all** individuals and communities.

Para 43

We are encouraged that many governments have established national strategies to leverage the opportunities of information and communications technologies for development, drawing on the framework of Action Lines agreed at the World Summit, **though few include a gender perspective and greater efforts are required to ensure systematic mainstreaming**, and that they also provide a range of e-government services to citizens and businesses, giving access to information and advice and, in many cases, the opportunity to undertake online transactions.

> **Commented [HM1]:** According to ITU, less than half of national digital strategies include a gender perspective. Even when included, it's often tokenistic rather than systematic.

Para 44

We recognise that digitalisation has enabled new ways of providing education and training in schools, higher and adult education including innovative educational approaches such as distance learning, open educational resources and online courses. We are concerned, however, that the benefits of digitalisation are still not available to many children and young people as a result of digital divides in connectivity and educational facilities. We reaffirm our commitment to **meaningfully** connecting every school to the Internet by 2030, **and ensuring equal access for girls and boys to digital learning opportunities.**

Para 48

We remain concerned, however, that equitable delivery of social and economic development programmes and opportunities is hampered by digital divides, particularly in countries and communities where access is constrained by poor connectivity, lack of affordability or **relevant content and negative social norms**. More attention is required to digital inclusion and digital literacy, capacity building and financial mechanisms in order to achieve greater impact and ensure progress towards the achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

Environmental impacts

Para 49

We welcome the ways in which digital technologies support environmental sustainability by enhancing monitoring and measurement of environmental change and hazards, implementing early warning systems in response to environmental threats, and enabling governments and development partners to prioritise interventions, protect those at greatest risk and forecast priorities for future action. Digital technologies can also enable improvements in the efficient use of energy and other resources through 'smart' management of economic, social and environmental systems and facilitating more efficient delivery of public services. Our cooperation will leverage digital technologies for sustainability while minimizing their negative environmental impacts **and ensuring that approaches are inclusive and equitable.**

The enabling environment for digital development

Para 56

We recognise that science, technology and innovation are integral to digital development, and that rapidly growing capabilities of digital technologies have contributed greatly to research and development across all scientific fields, enabling researchers to explore complex problems using methods that were unavailable before the Summit. We recognise the importance of ensuring that stakeholders in all countries are able to play a part in digital innovation, **especially by promoting women researchers and multidisciplinary teams that integrate gender data and analysis.**

Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs

Para 63

We commend the significant efforts that have been taken by governments, the private sector, civil society and the technical community to build confidence and security in the use of digital technologies and to protect infrastructure, services, transactions and other digital activity from the rising threat of cyberattacks **while recognizing the need for further measures to safeguard those most at risk of exclusion or harm**.

Para 64

We recognise that we must urgently counter and address all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, which occurs through or is amplified by the use of technology, all forms of hate speech and discrimination, misinformation and disinformation, cyberbullying and child sexual exploitation and abuse. We will establish and maintain robust, **proportionate, survivor-centered** risk mitigation, **access to justice and effective remedies** that also protect privacy and freedom of expression, **with responsibilities shared by all stakeholders, including digital platforms.**

Capacity development

Para 66

We note that lack of capacity is a major barrier to closing digital divides, and recommend that capacity development, including for innovation, be leveraged to empower local experts and local communities, **including women and girls**, to benefit from and contribute to information and communications technology applications for development.

Para 68

We recognise the importance of digital skills and lifelong access to digital learning opportunities, taking into account the specific social, cultural and linguistic needs of each society and persons of all ages and backgrounds **while addressing persistent gender gaps.**

Para 69

We recognise the need to build digital literacy in order to empower individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to identify reliable information that will help them to access opportunities and improve their quality of life, and to protect themselves against

misinformation and abuse, **especially women and girls who are disproportionately affected**. We call on all stakeholders to promote digital literacy and awareness-raising efforts to empower individuals, especially those in vulnerable situations, to understand and exercise their data protection and privacy rights, make informed choices about their personal data and take appropriate steps to safeguard their online security and privacy.

Financial mechanisms

Para 74

We note that the Sevilla Commitment, the outcome document of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development held in July 2025, recognised that closing the infrastructure gap in critical sectors, including information and communications technologies, will greatly improve access to essential services, employment opportunities, economic growth and sustainable development. We reaffirm the call in the Sevilla Commitment for coordinated investment in digital infrastructure, including digital public infrastructure, and digital public goods, **for financing approaches that are inclusive and gender-responsive and for** international collaboration between governments, development partners and private sector actors, to support countries in their design of digital infrastructure, its financing models and impact assessment.

> **Commented [HM2]:** In the preamble

Para 75

We recognise the critical importance of private sector investment in information and communications technology infrastructure, content and services, and we encourage Governments to create legal and regulatory frameworks conducive to increased investment and innovation in **responsible, accountable, transparent and human-centric ICTs.**

Human rights and ethical dimensions of the Information Society

Para 77

We recognize that human rights have been central to the vision of the World Summit on the Information Society and that information and communications technologies have shown their potential to strengthen the exercise of human rights, **including enabling the voices of those historically underrepresented, particularly women and marginalized groups**, enabling access to information, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association.

Para 90

We underscore the need to respect the independence of media, including digital media. We express particular concern about increased threats to the safety of journalists. In this context, we reaffirm that digital transformation must serve to uphold and advance, not restrict, fundamental rights and freedoms. We emphasise the crucial importance of safeguarding journalists, media workers, whistleblowers, human rights defenders and other civil society actors, who are increasingly targeted through digital means, **with particular attention to women who face gender-specific threats and are disproportionately affected**. We call on all stakeholders to prevent and respond to online and offline threats, including harassment, mass surveillance, and arbitrary detention linked to their legitimate activities.

Para 92

We stress the importance of ensuring that women and girls can participate in and contribute to society at large on equal terms and without discrimination, particularly in the realms of economic and political participation, and reaffirm that the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in the digital age is critical to achieving gender equality and women empowerment, sustainable development, peace and democracy. We commit to **mainstream gender equality across digital rights frameworks to** enhance and protect women's and girls' rights online and address the problems caused by inequality, discrimination and gender-based violence.

Data governance

Para 95

We reaffirm the approach to data governance that was adopted by the General Assembly in the Global Digital Compact, **which calls for addressing data divides, including gender and geographical data gaps.**

Artificial intelligence

Para 97

We note the significant developments that have taken place in the Information Society with the emergence in the public sphere of artificial intelligence, which significantly advances the pace and scale with which artificial intelligence is expected to have an impact on many aspects of human societies, and also acknowledge concerns about the potential negative impacts on employment, labour, the environment, human rights, information integrity and **gender equality, including risks of bias and discrimination that disproportionately affect women and marginalized groups.**

Para 101

We further request the Secretary General to launch an AI capacity building fellowship, leveraging existing UN system-wide capacities and within existing resources, in consultation with member states, aimed at strengthening the technical, practical knowledge and expertise of government officials to enable meaningful participation in global AI governance initiatives, in particular for developing countries, **and ensuring the equal and meaningful participation of women.**

Internet governance

Para 117

We further call upon the Forum to enhance its working modalities, including by reinforcing its intersessional work and supporting national and regional initiatives, and to apply innovative, open, inclusive, transparent and agile collaboration methods. We emphasize the need to broaden the participation of all relevant stakeholders, with particular attention to underrepresented communities, **to the equal participation of women,** as well as Governments and other stakeholders from developing countries.

The development of the WSIS framework

Para 131

We call on all Action Lines and Action Line facilitators to address gender equality and empowerment of women as a core theme **and systematically mainstream gender across** within their work to implement the outcomes of the Summit, with the full involvement of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and other stakeholders.

Monitoring and measurement

Para 132

We acknowledge the importance of data and statistics to support information and communications technology for development and call for further quantitative data, **disaggregated by sex and other characteristics,** to support evidence-based decision-making, as well as the inclusion of ICT data in national strategies for the development of statistics and regional statistical work programmes.

Para 137

We also call upon United Nations and other relevant organisations and forums to periodically review the methodologies for information and communications technology indicators, taking into account different levels of development and national circumstances, put in place data infrastructure at the national level on information and communications technologies, and share information about country case studies, **including methodologies to measure digital inclusion, capture the gender dimensions of technological change and the prevalence of violence against women and girls that occurs through or is amplified by the use of technology.**