



WSIS+20 INTERACTIVE STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATION (Asia Pacific)

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Rhizomatica's contribution to WSIS co-facilitators.

In 2003, the Geneva Declaration committed to transforming the digital divide into a digital opportunity for all—especially for those at risk of exclusion. To achieve this, WSIS Action Line 2 recognized that ICT infrastructure was the foundation of this vision.

In 2005 the Tunis Agenda reaffirmed those commitments and built on them by focusing on financial mechanisms for bridging the digital divide. But let's be clear, that focus was deliberately vague. It masked a broader reluctance from many governments to commit to concrete, actionable financing instruments.

As a result, the telecoms sector has since, been driven largely by for-profit commercial operators—thus excluding areas and communities that are not profitable. This misalignment has left the original WSIS vision of an inclusive, people-centred Information Society, largely unrealized.

Yes, market-driven models have expanded coverage in many cities. But two decades after the Geneva Declaration, billions of people remain off-line. This digital divide is deepening socio-economic inequality.



Truth is: We need new thinking. The WSIS review must champion innovative financing strategies beyond those focused on maximizing shareholders' profits.

The Tunis Agenda already recommended accelerating domestic financial instruments by supporting initiatives based on local communities. Yet, these recommendations have remained unimplemented and overlooked.

Today, a paradigm shift is urgent.

We must combine innovative financing with enabling regulation to support Community-Centered Connectivity Initiatives, just like the GDC committed to.

To support this transformation, we call on the WSIS co-facilitators to reflect the following in the Elements Paper:

First, acknowledge that digital inequality is worsening.

Second, recognize that meeting this challenge requires tangible commitments from member states and stakeholders to:

- 1) Diversify the access ecosystem beyond for-profit models
- 2) Remove regulatory barriers to community-centered connectivity
- 3) Enable access to unused spectrum through sharing frameworks
- 4) Make backbone networks more available and affordable for local networks
- 5) Raise awareness and build capacity around these models—especially among regulators and policymakers



6) And finally, develop fit-for-purpose financial instruments for local networks that blend public financing, like USFs; private financing from social investors and philanthropy.

This is our last chance to deliver on the promise made more than 20 years ago in Geneva.

We cannot afford to waste it.

Thank you,

Adriana Labardini