

# AI FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

AI GOVERNANCE PRIORITIES FOR UN/DESA AT WSIS+20

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +20 High-Level Meeting**, convened by the UN General Assembly, marks a **pivotal moment for shaping the future of global digital governance**. With the rapid and transformative rise of artificial intelligence (AI) over the last five years, WSIS's vision for an inclusive, development-oriented, and rights-based information society has been profoundly impacted. **To remain fit for purpose, the WSIS multistakeholder framework must now be updated** to fully reflect AI's systemic influence across every dimension of this digital ecosystem.

**This policy brief aims to support Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Li Junhua, in navigating the fragmented landscape of global AI governance.** It reinforces WSIS's role as a central platform for international digital cooperation while ensuring that UN/DESA's priorities of meaningful connectivity and "AI for all" are fully reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**Three UN frameworks on AI governance are competing:** the Global Digital Compact (GDC), the Secretary-General's AI Advisory Board, and the WSIS architecture. They advance differing normative imperatives across development, human rights, and security risks. **UN/DESA is uniquely positioned to bridge these divides** by streamlining the standards and principles of the GDC and the AI Advisory Board within the WSIS+20 Zero Draft. **In doing so, the UN/DESA would clarify the synergies among these pillars, capture the cross-cutting nature of AI, and foster a unified UN vision to meet this collective-action challenge.**

To maintain consensus at the High-Level Meeting, **UN/DESA should emphasise the central role of capacity-building, shared knowledge, and harmonised international standards in mitigating the transnational security risks of AI.** By leveraging the strong political momentum around AI-driven security threats, UN/DESA can ensure that its inclusion and development-centred approach remains firmly anchored in the global AI governance agenda, rather than overshadowed by parallel initiatives that prioritise a single normative imperative.



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# FRAMING STRATEGY

As lead coordinator of the WSIS+20 Review process, UN/DESA is uniquely positioned to advance a shared normative foundation and encourage a unified UN approach. **The WSIS+20 outcome document should thus reflect the intersectional impacts of AI and the synergies across global development, human-rights protection, and global safety, which will shape how to best harness AI's opportunities and address its risks.**

To advance its vision of integrating a development-centred AI governance agenda into WSIS, **UN/DESA should adopt a two-fold framing strategy:**

## 1 **Assert AI as a core pillar of the Information Society for Development and, therefore, a central pillar of the WSIS framework.**

- WSIS's development-focused mandate allows it to lead an inclusive, multistakeholder AI governance agenda aligned with human rights, complementing other relevant UN bodies.
- AI impacts all WSIS priorities, including digital divide reduction, economic inclusion, environmental sustainability, and ICT security.
- Embedding AI into WSIS ensures institutional coherence and meaningful participation of developing countries in AI governance.
- WSIS's architecture, like digital transformation, must remain flexible and adaptable to effectively promote equitable AI readiness and digital inclusion.

## 2 **Leverage the political momentum around AI-driven security threats to advance an inclusive, development-oriented, and human-rights-centred approach to AI governance.**

- Emphasise how the centralisation of AI and emerging monopolies intensifies risks of weaponisation, unilateral coercion, and systemic exclusion, undermining global stability and widening development disparities.
- Assert that mitigating AI-driven security threats and maximizing AI's development benefits converge in advancing equitable AI capacity-building, shared knowledge, and harmonized international standards grounded on human -rights.

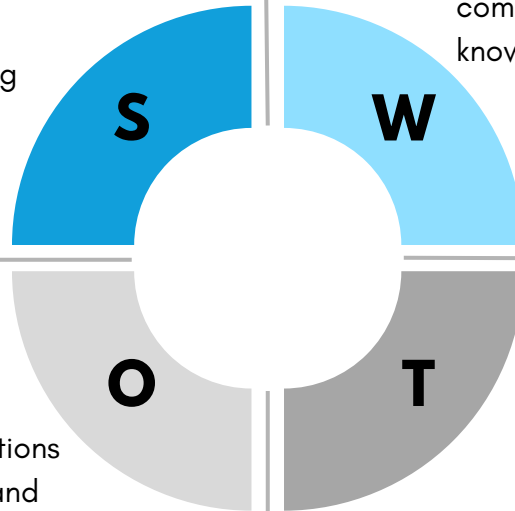
**This two-fold framing strategy will broaden consensus among member states, including those cautious about rights and development-focused multilateral initiatives. It enables UN/DESA to maintain its core agenda of sustainable, inclusive digital development, while clearly linking it to the security challenges arising from AI's concentration of power and transnational impact.**

## FRAMING STRATEGY SWOT ANALYSIS

**Pursuing such a strategy exposes UN/DESA to specific opportunities and threats that need to be identified for effective and predictable negotiations:**

- Aligns with MS. call for WSIS and GDC streamlined action.
- Emphasises bridging the AI divide, securing broad support from developing countries.
- Incorporates security risks that resonate across geopolitical divides.
- Frames AI capacity-building as a key WSIS+20 priority.

- Complex messaging risks diluting focus or overwhelming stakeholders.
- Pushback likely from dominant AI powers resistant to international oversight.
  - Fragmented governance landscape complicates standard-setting and knowledge sharing.



- Position WSIS as a global multistakeholder hub for AI governance
- Build multistakeholder coalitions linking development, tech, and security sectors for comprehensive AI governance solutions.
- Reflect UN/DESA's mission in the global AI governance agenda

- Jeopardise consensus and fuel unilateral AI governance regimes.
- US's explicit rejection of international oversight
- Risk of alienating authoritarian regimes that frame human-rights risks of AI as issues of national sovereignty

*Figure 1 - SWOT analysis covering the proposed framing strategy of UN/DESA*

Targeted **rhetorical elements can mitigate/foster these SWOT's** during the negotiation process:



### RHETORICAL ELEMENTS

*"The AI divide and security threats are mutually reinforcing, risking a "two-tier AI world" that undermines digital sovereignty and global stability."*

*"Bridging the AI divide through inclusive capacity-building and shared international AI knowledge, norms, and standards is essential both for sustainable development and for mitigating transnational risks linked to monopolistic power and AI weaponisation."*

*"AI governance must be human-centred and rights-based, integrating protections against discriminatory or coercive uses that exacerbate vulnerabilities."*

*"The WSIS+20 outcome is a critical juncture to link sustainable, equitable digital transformation with global security through multilateral and multistakeholder cooperation."*

# COALITION BUILDING

UN/DESA should organise actors into workable coalitions to secure a consensus aligned with its agenda.

The goal is to protect the stability of the process by viewing coalitions as a negotiation map rather than opposing blocks. This strategy encourages collaboration and constructive engagement to ensure the effectiveness of the Outcome Document and support the viable introduction of new WSIS follow-up mechanisms.

## THE 4 FAULT LINES

1. **Development vs Rights (North-South)**
2. **State-led vs Multistakeholder governance**
3. **UN-centric vs Distributed governance**
4. **Data/AI sovereignty vs open digital ecosystem**

The **best outcome** for UN/DESA will be achieved by **effectively balancing four key fault lines**.

### COAL. 1 - DEVELOPMENT & CAPACITY-BUILDING

G77 & China (esp. Cuba, India)

#### Focus:

- AI capacity-building & financing
- Tech transfer + closing digital divides
- Open access to data
- WSIS → global development hub for AI.

### COAL. 2 - HUMAN RIGHTS & INCLUSION

EU & LAC (+ Canada, Australia, NZ)

#### Focus:

- Rights-based AI governance
- Fair, private & secure Algorithms
- Human autonomy & Gender equality

### IDENTIFIED COALITIONS

### COAL. 3 - MULTISTAKEHOLDER MODEL

Japan, US & South Korea (+ tech community, private sector, civil society)

#### Focus:

- Uphold WSIS's multistakeholder model
- Promote global stds. & safety frameworks
- Include technical expertise
- Counter 'authoritarian' digital governance

### COAL. 4 - INTL. COOPERATION

India, Togo & Switzerland

#### Focus:

- Bridge WSIS, GDC & AI Advisory Body
- Promote interoperability & UN coherence
- Keeping China, Russia Gulf States and many Sub-Saharan states in the conversation

Figure 2 - Identified coalitions within the WSIS+20 debate

# RECOMMENDATIONS

UN/DESA should take action at three distinct stages within the WSIS+20 review process: amending the Zero Draft document (S1), introducing the new '+20 Action Lines' (S2), and establishing an updated WSIS framework (S3) aligned with emerging technologies and recent UN institutional developments.

STAGES:



## S1 - AMENDING THE ZERO DRAFT

The rapid advancement of AI is reshaping every aspect of society; yet, **the current Zero Draft addresses AI marginally**, explicitly mentioning it in only one section. **AI must be systematically integrated across the entire Outcome Document**, embedding it as a core pillar of the Information Society for Development.

This means revising the Outcome Document to explicitly reference AI in each section, **highlighting relevant opportunities and risks**. Through this lens, **WSIS+20 outlines a holistic AI governance vision advancing the 2030 Agenda and preventing AI misuse**.

### MAINSTREAMING AI RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

To support these amendments, **the proposed Risks & Opportunities analysis is grounded in the High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence's final report: "Governing AI for Humanity" (results presented in Figure 3)**. **UN/DESA should integrate these findings directly into the Zero Draft to address current gaps**.

**EXAMPLE** - While **the Capacity Development section** acknowledges a major barrier to closing digital divides, the language **remains general and insufficient for the AI era**. **UN/DESA should work to include the following paragraph to incorporate clear and actionable mandates** that strengthen AI governance and policy frameworks.

“  
*59. We recognise that capacity development is essential to closing AI divides and ensuring that developing countries can meaningfully participate in AI-driven innovation and governance. We are concerned about the lack of technical expertise, computing infrastructure, and financial resources needed to build sovereign AI capacity in these countries, as well as the persistent loss of trained talent. We call on all stakeholders to scale up international cooperation and financing for AI capacity development, including technology transfer, access to data and compute, specialised training programmes, and mechanisms that strengthen expertise retention. We further commit to enhancing the mandates and resources of international forums, including the IGF, to support coordinated global efforts that advance equitable AI readiness.*  
”

## AI RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS

CATEGORY	OPPORTUNITIES	RISKS
ICTS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scientific discovery</li> <li>Transforming education</li> <li>Enhancing public policy effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Algorithmic discrimination &amp; biases</li> <li>Mass surveillance</li> <li>Inequitable access to AI tools</li> </ul>
ICTS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boosting productivity &amp; HC development</li> <li>Leapfrogging opportunities</li> <li>High-growth industries stimulation</li> <li>Greater involvement of SMEs in global value chains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job disruption</li> <li>Market power concentration</li> <li>Funding and investment inequality</li> <li>Economic dependence</li> </ul>
BRIDGING DIGITAL DIVIDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AI as a public good</li> <li>Optimisation of connectivity deployment to underserved areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over-concentration of AI capability</li> <li>Missing linguistic and cultural data reinforcing biases</li> <li>Risk of AI supply chain exploitation</li> </ul>
INTERNET GOVERNANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scalable content moderation</li> <li>Misinformation detection</li> <li>Enhanced accessibility, inclusion, and infrastructure optimization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Algorithmic bias in content moderation</li> <li>Platform dominance &amp; gatekeeping</li> <li>Deepfakes &amp; AI-generated content proliferation</li> <li>Exclusion of developing countries</li> </ul>
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate modelling and early warning systems</li> <li>Optimization of resource production &amp; management</li> <li>Disaster response and environmental monitoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High resource use (energy, water, materials)</li> <li>Chip mining pressures &amp; labour abuses</li> <li>Algorithmic harm to ecosystems</li> </ul>
BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY IN ICTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in cybersecurity &amp; threat detection capabilities</li> <li>AI-enabled digital identity and authentication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AI-powered cyber-attacks</li> <li>Disinformation</li> <li>Autonomous agents acting unpredictably</li> </ul>
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T-Shaped policy expert model</li> <li>Local innovation ecosystems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LICs lack of initial resources and skills</li> <li>Brain drain (or structural retention failure)</li> </ul>
HUMAN RIGHTS AND ETHICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring of human rights violations</li> <li>Advancing SDGs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surveillance, misinformation, and discrimination</li> <li>Erosion of privacy &amp; freedom of expression</li> </ul>
FINANCIAL MECHANISMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanding UN Global Fund for AI</li> <li>New PPPs</li> <li>Development bank support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LMICs lack resources to invest in AI infrastructure</li> <li>Long-term dependency</li> </ul>
DATA GOVERNANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data trusts</li> <li>Cross-border interoperability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Big tech accumulation and use of data</li> <li>Data colonialism</li> <li>Privacy breaches</li> </ul>



Figure 3 - Table of the Risk & Opportunities of AI, identified within the "Governing AI for Humanity" report

# S2 - THE NEW +20 ACTION LINES

The existing **WSIS Action Lines (AL)** aimed to promote the role of ICTs in fostering an **inclusive knowledge society** that generates, shares, and ensures universal access to knowledge, ultimately improving the human condition. However, developed and institutionalised during the 2003 Geneva and 2005 Tunis summits, **these AL are now outdated**. Today's **rapid technological advancements, especially in AI, are reshaping human-technology interactions and the wider digital environment, highlighting the need to update the current framework**.

## THE DUAL MOMENTUM

AI Revolution + WSIS 20th anniversary

By framing this moment as pivotal for digital governance, **UN/DESA should leverage this dual momentum to introduce new +20 Action Lines**.

## PROPOSITION FOR THE NEW +20 ACTION LINES

WSIS ACTION LINES	LINKED SDGS	GDC (1-5)
<b>C1</b> Public governance authorities & stakeholders	1 3 5 10 16 17	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C2</b> Info & communication infrastructure	1 8 9 11	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C3</b> Access to info & knowledge	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C4</b> Capacity building	1 2 3 4 5 6 12 13 14 16 17	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C5</b> Confidence & security in ICTs	1 4 5 7 8 9 11 16 17	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C6</b> Enabling environment	2 4 5 8 9 10 11 16 17	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C7</b> ICT Applications	9 16 17	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C8</b> Cultural, linguistic diversity	2 4 6 8 11 12	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C9</b> Media	5 9 12 16	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C10</b> Ethical dimensions	1 2 3 4 5 8 9 10 11 12 13 16 17	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C11</b> International cooperation	17	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C12</b> Human-Tech Interaction	3 4 5 16	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C13</b> Biases & fairness	5 10 16	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C14</b> Data privacy & surveillance	9 10 16 17	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C15</b> Sustainable development	6 7 8 11 12 13 14 15	1 2 3 4 5
<b>C16</b> Private sector accountability	8 9 10 16	1 2 3 4 5

Figure 4 - Scheme of the existing and new action lines mapped to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Global Digital Compact (GDC) objectives.

SDGs: <b>X,X...</b> Linked	GDC: <b>X</b> Linked	New +20 Action Line <b>Cx</b>
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**These five new proposed +20 Action Lines, which follow the technologically neutral approach of the original framework, preserve its flexibility and adaptability. They increase granularity to better reflect new tech-induced trends and challenges. The +20 Action Lines aim to align WSIS objectives with the GDC and the SDGs.** Designed for seamless integration with other UN frameworks, they seek to unify the UN's efforts and reinforce a coherent, inclusive digital development agenda.

# S3 - UPDATING THE WSIS FRAMEWORK AND ITS FOLLOW-UP MECHANISMS

WSIS+20 represents a pivotal moment to reform the existing WSIS Action Lines. **To ensure the long-term success and enforcement of all Action lines, it is essential to reaffirm the role of current WSIS institutions, create new initiatives, and foster collaboration across UN agencies.** This will help establish a unified AI and digital governance framework, particularly in alignment with the agenda set by the "Governing AI for Humanity" report. **The following actions are recommended:**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1 HOMOGENIZATION OF UN ACTION (CORE RECOMMENDATION)

**Goal:** align the WSIS framework with the GDC to avoid duplication

→ *No overhaul of WSIS frameworks, but aligning their objectives through unified frameworks and new follow-up mechanisms to reinforce existing UN AI and data initiatives.*

### 2 RENEWAL OF THE WSIS INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM (IGF)

**Goal:** maintain the IGF as the central, multistakeholder forum for governing the internet as a global resource

→ *Strengthen collaboration with the newly established Global Dialogue on AI Governance, particularly on AI governance, to develop mutual reporting on shared objectives.*

### 3 WSIS TASK FORCE ON AI-HUMAN INTERACTION

**Goal:** sharpen the focus on human rights in the UN's annual AI report (short term) & develop expertise for global monitoring and risk mitigation in human-AI interaction, while advancing human-centric international rights and legal frameworks (long term)

→ *Through the extension of the UN International Scientific Panel on AI, expand research on risk measurement and identification, Explainable AI (XAI & black-box challenges), and AI consciousness.*

### 4 WSIS EQUITABLE AI FUND

**Goal:** Close financing gaps, prevent brain drain, and enhance technology transfer to promote regional inclusion and build local AI capacity in developing countries.

→ *Expand the UN Global AI Fund through regional quotas, leveraging private and non-financial contributions, while coordinating with development banks to effectively manage investment risks.*

### 5 UN-BACKED OPEN-SOURCE AI REPOSITORY

**Goal:** Foster 'AI as a GPG' by creating an open-source public library of models, datasets, and APIs, enabling worldwide access to AI technology, training, and capacity-building initiatives.

→ *Build public-private partnerships leveraging diverse existing open-source repositories (e.g. Hugging Face, PyTorch...) governed under the WSIS framework.*



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