

Oral Statement for Intervention at WSIS+20 Information Consultations on July 29, 2025

By Socheata Sokhachan

1. Thank you.
2. My name is Socheata, and I'm from Cambodia. As a country that has experienced deep historical wounds and, more recently, tensions and conflicts with our neighboring country that have brought sacrifice and hardship, we know firsthand how fragile peace can be — and how essential it is for progress.
3. For us, peace is not just the absence of conflict. It is the foundation for development, for hope, and for building a digital future where no one is left behind.
4. It is with this spirit that I speak today, representing young digital leaders from across Asia-Pacific economies who gathered virtually this early July for the APAC Youth WSIS+20 Series, organized by NetMission.Asia.
5. We welcome the Elements Paper's recognition that ICTs are central to achieving the 2030 Agenda and to building inclusive, resilient societies. However, based on our regional youth consultations, we emphasize that digital development must go **beyond access** to be truly transformational.
6. Despite advancements in broadband and mobile coverage, youth in rural and low-income communities still face significant barriers — from affordability and low digital literacy to the lack of localized, relevant content. These realities were echoed by our Asian youth and remote Pacific island states — where national coverage statistics often obscure real gaps in usability, service quality, and inclusion.
7. We call for a **rights-based and user-centered** approach to ICTs for development. This includes:
 - a. **Broadening the definition of connectivity** to include speed, latency, affordability, and fair competition — not just infrastructure rollout.
 - b. **Investing in capacity-building** for underserved areas, with support for youth-led digital literacy programs and public-private partnerships that prioritize skills, not just access to devices.
 - c. **Enabling youth-driven innovation**, from local-language AI tools for healthcare and agriculture to community-managed digital learning hubs.
8. As one of our contributors from Pakistan said:
9. "ICTs must empower youth to solve local problems, not just consume global content."

10. We urge WSIS+20 stakeholders to embed youth as **co-creators, not just beneficiaries**, of ICT strategies — and to provide sustained support to grassroots initiatives that center Indigenous, rural, and marginalized youth in digital development efforts.
11. Let's ensure that ICTs don't just connect — but **uplift, empower, and enable** every young person to thrive in the digital age.
12. Thank you.