WSIS+20 INTERACTIVE STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATION
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Input by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
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The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is a network of more than 80 organisations located in the global south who work with digital technologies to improve people's lives and achieve social, gender and environmental justice.

The WSIS vision is as relevant now as it was in 2003. What has evolved are the challenges and while the overall WSIS Framework remains suited to meeting them there is a need to fill key gaps, prioritise and update the action lines, targets and commitments in the WSIS outcome documents.

We believe the **Elements Paper** should highlight the following:

1. **Firstly, digital inequality.** It is the greatest priority as it is a pre-requisite for achieving the WSIS vision and goals. Digital inequality is not just persisting, it is growing, often amplifying existing inequalities shaped by gender, race, geographical location, income and education. Being connected is no longer enough to achieve the WSIS vision of a world "where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge…. to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life". As more daily transactions and public services are digitalised, those without meaningful connectivity are even more marginalised than they were in a pre-digital world.

   Addressing digital inequality requires acknowledging that market-led expansion has been insufficient. Billions of people remain off-line. This digital divide is deepening socio-economic inequality. 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. 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.

2. **Secondly, environmental justice and sustainability.** Digitalisation worsens the climate crisis, pollution, and biodiversity loss to an extent not anticipated at the WSIS summits. Governments and all other stakeholders must conduct regular environmental and human rights impact assessments throughout the full life cycle of digital innovations, with meaningful input from affected communities. The WSIS process has to approach

digitalisation in a manner that mitigates environmental harms by prioritizing people's well-being and the planet's future.

3. **Thirdly, reasserting the public interest and global development goals in how data is governed and digital technologies developed, used and regulated.** Key to this is addressing the growing dominance of corporate power concentrated in the hands of a few big companies who have demonstrated that self-regulation fails to ensure their compliance with international human rights standards, fair payment of tax, open and competitive markets and the prevention of harm to people and our national environment. Data should be governed as a public resources that can be used and shared for development and improving people's lives. This is as important as is the protection of personal data.

4. **Fourthly, applying the human-rights based approach to digital governance.** This involves consistent consideration of linkages between economic, social and cultural and civil and political rights and digitalisation, as well as women's rights, the rights of people with disabilities, children's rights and all other rights that form part of the international and regional human rights system. It also involves ensuring participation, transparency and empowerment in digital governance processes and their outcomes.

5. **Fifthly, placing gender justice at the core of the WSIS process** by establishing a standalone Action Line on gender and gender specific indicators and targets.

Furthermore, enhancing coherence in digital governance requires:

- Enhancing coherence in digital governance has to start with a strengthened Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and making its mandate permanent. We need an "IGF Plus" that can be a platform for public participation, debate and learning on all aspects of digital governance. The name of the IGF should be changed to reflect that it deals with broader digital governance as opposed to just "internet governance".

- WSIS and Global Digital Compact (GDC) implementation and follow up should be integrated with the GDC objectives being linked to the existing WSIS framework particularly at national and regional levels where WSIS implementation plans have been used for the last 20 years. The IGF and the WSIS Forum can alternate in Beijing used as platforms for the AI dialogue emanating from the GDC.

- Thirdly by recognising that the WSIS principles of participation and the multistakeholder approach need to be applied consistently in a way that acknowledges and addresses power asymmetries between and within countries, communities and stakeholder groups. This approach is not an alternative to democratic governance, but a means to achieving more accountable and inclusive governance at multilateral, national and multistakeholder levels.