

WSIS+20 Stakeholder Consultations:



Inputs to the Elements Paper

July 2025

WSIS+20 Stakeholder Consultations: Inputs to the Elements Paper. As part of the preparatory process for the WSIS+20 High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly (16–17 December 2025), this written consultation seeks inputs from all stakeholders to inform the *Zero Draft* of the outcome document. This process is aligned with the indicative roadmap shared by the WSIS+20 Co-Facilitators (Albania and Kenya) and will feed into negotiations through the Elements Paper and subsequent drafts. Your responses will contribute to shaping a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society, reaffirming WSIS principles while addressing emerging digital trends and governance challenges.

1. What are the most important achievements arising from WSIS that should be highlighted in the Zero Draft?

The last two decades have seen significant efforts by all stakeholders to implement WSIS Action Lines. This collaborative work resulted in tremendous growth in connectivity and facilitated a remarkable evolution of information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, which has become a critical enabler for sustainable development.

In 2005, only 16 percent of people worldwide were online. In the last 20 years, Internet use has grown significantly. In 2024, around 68 percent of the global population—5.5 billion people—were online, according to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). 4.5 billion more people are now connected, an increase of 52 percentage points.

The Internet has become an indispensable resource for information, communication, and human connection. It has fueled extraordinary economic growth and catalyzed social progress, enabling more individuals, communities, and people to achieve their full potential in promoting sustainable development and improving quality of life.

This extraordinary evolution was possible thanks to all stakeholders being involved in making the changes happen. The multistakeholder approach, enshrined in the Tunis Agenda and reaffirmed in the WSIS+10 review outcomes, facilitated cooperation among governments, businesses, civil society, and the technical community, multiplying multistakeholder partnerships to implement the WSIS Action Lines. The



multistakeholder model of Internet Governance, which is at the core of how the Internet has been built and is operating, played a vital role in these achievements.

Collaboration across borders has helped many countries establish Internet access, ccTLDs, IXPs, community networks, and national strategies and policies for the Internet. Collaboration has strengthened the security of Internet communications and defense against security threats, ensuring that people, businesses, and countries are more secure and do not face cyber threats alone. Global sharing of expertise, capacity building, and support allows countries cut off from the Internet due to natural disasters to be reconnected faster and facilitates the deployment of relief services. Global cooperation between many stakeholders, in many countries, from many cultures, has built the global digital society we have today.

For two decades, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), an outcome of WSIS, has successfully served as the world's primary multistakeholder platform for dialogue on Internet governance issues. The IGF and more than 180 regional and national IGFs have fostered meaningful information exchange, shared understanding, and opportunities to advance solutions, which have contributed to real-world change.

The Elements Paper (Para 5) already emphasizes that the WSIS process has been defined by multistakeholder cooperation and recognizes an indispensable role of stakeholder collaboration in achieving WSIS outcomes. We believe that the Zero Draft should explicitly acknowledge the role of the multistakeholder collaboration not only in the WSIS process, but also in achieving significant progress in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes. We also strongly urge the Zero Draft to recognize the crucial role of the Global IGF and National and Regional IGFs in those successes.

2. What are the most important challenges to the achievement of WSIS outcomes to date and in the future that need to be addressed in the Zero Draft?

Despite the considerable successes in implementing the WSIS outcomes, one-third of the world's population still lacks access to the Internet. The lack of connectivity creates digital and economic divides, while technological innovation and the digitization of essential services broaden inequalities.

Alongside the uneven progress in connectivity, there is a range of challenges impacting the open and global nature of the Internet. Some of these challenges come from countries seeking to impose national sovereignty on the Internet or laws with extra-territorial reach. Others are posed by cybersecurity threats, the impact of AI, and diminishing trust, to name a few.

We appreciate that the Elements Paper highlights digital divides and the need to address the growing inequality. We hope that the relevant sections of the Zero Draft (Bridging Digital Divides, Enabling

Environment, Capacity Building) focus on connecting communities and ensuring that Internet access is available and affordable. To this end, the Zero Draft should:

- Recognize the importance of providing global connectivity and commit to using Universal Service Funds to bring affordable access to unconnected, underserved, low-income, and rural communities.
- Recognize the importance of meaningful and inclusive access for all and urge stakeholders to ensure that content and services are available in people's languages, and that persons with disabilities can access information, participate equally, and enjoy the same services as those without disabilities.
- Recognize the vital role of capacity-building in promoting connectivity and bridging digital divides.
- Recognize the essential role of community-centered connectivity initiatives and focus on creating an enabling policy and regulatory environment for these solutions.

Furthermore, to fully benefit from the opportunities of the Internet, people need an Internet that is open, global, secure, and trustworthy. Besides promoting connectivity, the Zero Draft should focus on continuing to build security and confidence in the use of ICTs and preserving the open and global nature of the Internet.

Great improvements have been made in Internet security; yet there are still concerns about privacy, safety, and security online. We strongly recommend that the Zero Draft recognize the crucial role of capacity building and collaborative multistakeholder approaches in addressing security challenges, and emphasize the need for:

- Multistakeholder information sharing on Internet security threats, strategy, and policy.
- Enhancing the digital skills of users, technical experts, and policymakers.
- Adoption and implementation of cybersecurity best practices and development of a culture of cybersecurity.
- The use of futureproof end-to-end encryption and other security technologies to secure and protect the confidentiality and integrity of communications and data.

Lastly, preserving the open and global nature of the Internet and the multistakeholder model of its governance is crucial for the implementation of the WSIS outcomes. We strongly suggest that the Zero Draft build on existing frameworks that acknowledge the openness of the Internet and its multistakeholder governance, like Para 26-27 of the GDC. Based on the commitments of WSIS and GDC, we urge the Zero Draft to:

- Recognize the openness of the Internet and commit to preserving and enhancing it.
- Reaffirm the commitment to the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, and pledge to ensure inclusive and meaningful participation from all stakeholders.

3. What are the most important priorities for action to achieve the WSIS vision of a ‘people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society’ in the future, taking into account emerging trends?

We strongly believe that meaningful connectivity is a bedrock for achieving the main goal of the WSIS: to build a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society. While looking at emerging digital trends and technologies is important, the WSIS process should focus on people and how the connectivity improves their lives.

In our answer to Question 2, we highlighted our suggestions related to **fostering connectivity, providing an enabling environment, building confidence and security in the use of ICTs, and preserving the openness of the Internet and the multistakeholder model of its governance**. We strongly believe that these are the utmost priorities in achieving the WSIS vision.

The new and emerging technologies should be approached through the lens of the WSIS’s main goal: employing the benefits of technological developments to meaningfully connect those who are not yet connected and move towards universal connectivity. Therefore, the topics related to emerging trends and technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, should stay within the current relevant WSIS Action Lines, especially those related to connectivity, sustainable development, capacity building, and cultural and linguistic diversity.

4. What additional themes/issues, if any, should be included in the Elements Paper?

The Elements paper should have reflected on all the WSIS Action Lines. We expect the Zero Draft document to provide a more comprehensive reflection.

In relation to specific issues that should have been included in the Elements Paper, the Internet Society is deeply concerned by the insufficient emphasis on the significance of ICTs in inclusive development under the theme “Information and communications technologies for development.” We strongly recommend building on the language of the WSIS+10 Review Outcome Document, which explicitly acknowledges the critical role of ICTs in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals and contributing to greater social benefit and inclusion.

We are also surprised by the lack of mention of cultural and linguistic diversity in the Elements Paper. While multilingualism is acknowledged in the context of Internet content, any references to cultural diversity (Action Line C8) are notably missing. This omission is particularly concerning given the widening digital divides and the rapid development and deployment of AI technologies. We urge proper consideration of cultural diversity as a core component of the WSIS's vision to build a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented information society.

5. Do you wish to comment on particular themes/issues/paragraphs in the Elements Paper?

Our responses to Questions 2 and 4 provided comments on the topics related to ICT for Development, Bridging Digital Divides, Social and Cultural Development, Enabling Environment, and Capacity Building. Among the remaining topics, we have concerns about the following themes:

1) Internet Governance

The language on Internet governance should be updated in the Zero Draft to accurately reflect the agreements made in the WSIS+10 Outcome Document and the GDC, both recognizing the multistakeholder nature of Internet governance and the importance of the technical community as a stakeholder. We recommend reaffirming Para 57-59 of the WSIS+10 Outcome document and including the following developments:

- Commit to the Guidelines in the NETmundial+10 Outcome Document to enable stakeholders to engage more meaningfully in Internet governance processes.
- Commit to promoting greater participation in the Internet governance discussions by Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, the technical and academic communities, and all other relevant stakeholders, nationally and regionally.

Considering the renewal of the IGF mandate, we propose the following language to be included in the Zero Draft:

- “We recognize the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) has served as the world’s **primary multistakeholder platform for dialogue on Internet governance** for 20 years. It has enabled open, inclusive, and informed discussions that have constructively shaped global Internet policy and its implementation.
- We ask the UN Secretary General to extend the existing mandate of the Internet Governance Forum, as set out in paragraphs 72 to 78 of the Tunis Agenda, indefinitely, with sustainable funding.

- We commit to work with all stakeholders to evolve the Internet Governance Forum to more effectively accommodate discussions, non-binding policy development and capacity-building in the governance of digital services.
- We commit to continuing to encourage and support national and regional Internet Governance Initiatives for local capacity-building and collaboration”.

With regard to Enhanced Cooperation, we suggest noting that progress has been made in existing frameworks for cooperation to address emerging issues and recognizing the need to strengthen existing mechanisms both within the UN system and beyond to ensure the full participation of all stakeholders.

2) Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs

We observe that the Elements Paper has expanded the scope of building confidence and security in the use of ICTs beyond its framing in the WSIS framework by highlighting the UN cybercrime treaty, a legal instrument for criminal investigation and law enforcement, and UN nation state initiatives on responsible state behavior in cyberspace. We believe the **focus should instead be on the collaborative approach to security** which has been fundamental in building confidence in the use of ICTs. Internet security is a collective responsibility: multistakeholder cross-border collaboration is essential. We recommend the Zero Draft to focus on this component rather than the processes outside of the WSIS mandate.

3) Artificial Intelligence

We are not convinced that a particular technological development (AI) requires a separate section. Rather than creating new items, the Zero Draft should focus on how AI-related challenges could be addressed through the current WSIS framework (e.g., capacity building, bridging digital divides, linguistic diversity, and others). For example, we believe that the WSIS+20 should emphasize the importance of open standards and interoperability as essential building blocks for Artificial Intelligence.

Furthermore, the current focus of this theme is solely multilateral, despite the relevant existing frameworks, such as the GDC (Para 50), recognizing the need for the meaningful participation of all stakeholders in AI governance.

6. What suggestions do you have to support the development of the WSIS framework (WSIS Action Lines, IGF, WSIS Forum, UNGIS etc.)?

Internet Society believes that there is **no need to open the WSIS Action Lines**. The current WSIS Action Lines are technology-neutral and have accommodated the technological developments that have occurred to date. The development of the WSIS framework should be supported by addressing new and

emerging issues through better implementation of the Action Lines and collaboration between various stakeholders.

In this regard, we would like to highlight the importance of the Internet Governance Forum, which has become an indispensable element for the implementation of the WSIS outcomes. The IGF is a unique platform for various stakeholders to exchange experiences and practices and inform various efforts in their local communities. This platform has proven its ability to evolve, build mechanisms for intersessional work, and incorporate discussions related to new challenges.

We call for the Zero Draft to recognize this unique role, confirm the IGF mandate, and make it permanent. We also suggest recognizing the role of the National and Regional Internet Governance Initiatives and the need to preserve their bottom-up nature and unique structures.

7. Do you have any other comments?

Internet Society appreciates the co-facilitators' efforts in developing the Elements Paper and commends their commitment to engaging stakeholders in the preparation of the Zero Draft.

In addition to our previous comments, we would like to suggest that the Zero Draft provide more clarity on the approach to the WSIS Action Lines. Currently, it is unclear whether the Elements Paper suggests opening the Action Lines, for example, by adding a new Action Line on Artificial Intelligence. We are not convinced there is consensus to open the Action Lines, nor do we believe the current timeline gives stakeholders enough time for such negotiations. Therefore, it is premature to include any language that would lead to adding new or opening existing WSIS Action Lines. In any event, the Zero Draft of the outcome document should explicitly state whether the intent is to strengthen the existing Action Lines through their implementation by reflecting on new issues and challenges or to create new Action Lines.

We urge the Zero Draft to follow the approach taken in Para. 1-3 of the WSIS+10 Outcome Document and reaffirm the commitments to the WSIS vision, the Geneva Declaration of Principles, the Geneva Plan of Action and its Action Lines, the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, and the values and principles of multistakeholder cooperation and engagement.

This input into the Elements Paper has been endorsed by some Internet Society Chapters. The full list of endorsements is available via the link: <https://actionnetwork.org/forms/endorse-the-internet-societys-contribution-to-the-wsis20-elements-paper/>