



General Assembly’s overall review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes

Official Form for Written Submissions

A. Your Information

Title: Click here to enter text.

First name: Click here to enter text. **Last name:** Click here to enter text.

Name of Organization: Alliance of Small Island States **Stakeholder Type¹:** Government

Country: Click here to enter text. **Email:** mission@maldivesmission.com/midhfa@maldivesmission.com

B. Formal Input

The World Summit on the Information Society has declared our common desire and commitment to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented information society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, and individuals, communities and all peoples are enabled to achieve their full potentials in promoting sustainable development and improving quality of life.

In the last decade, we have made significant progress in promoting and achieving many of the objectives that we set forth, ranging from addressing the digital divide to the rapid deployment of ICTs in developing countries. Internet services have transformed the lives of many, including those who live in developing countries. It has impacted the economy on a great scale and its benefits can be felt across social sectors, be it in education, healthcare, culture, politics, social welfare and access to information.

¹ When specifying your stakeholder type, please indicate one of the following: Government, Civil Society, Private Sector, Academia, and Technical Sector.

In spite of this success, challenges remain to the full implementation of WSIS goals and objectives, including new issues that have emerged in the last decade. Further efforts must be made to ensure that the benefits from an interconnected world leave no one behind.

In spite of the fact that ICT penetration has had a huge developmental impact, many obstacles still remain for universal access to technology and connectivity. In order for WSIS outcomes to be achieved in its entirety, targeted efforts must be made to ensure affordable and relevant ICT penetration in the most vulnerable communities.

Small island developing countries (SIDS) face unique developmental challenges caused due to their small size, geographic isolation, limited capacity, environmental risks and natural disasters. While the Tunis Agenda had correctly identified ICT as a tool to enhance developmental efforts of countries, it did not adequately recognize the key role and the immense opportunity presented by ICT penetration particularly in SIDS. The review process must take into account the Dubai Declaration (2014), which noted that, “the LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS and countries with economies in transition face the most challenges in the development and use of telecommunications/ICTs. The World Telecommunication Development Conference (Dubai, 2014) reaffirms the ITU’s global commitment to address the special telecommunication/ICT needs of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS”.

One of the founding principles of WSIS was the issue of addressing the digital divide. Lack of access to affordable and reliable technologies continues to remain the key challenge to ICT deployment among SIDS. Efforts need to be made for capacity building to enable access, especially in social sectors like health and education. Samoa Pathway supports this in paragraph 27(g), by promoting “the use of information and communications technologies for, inter alia, education, the creation of employment, in particular youth employment, and economic sustainability purposes in Small Island developing States”.

Lack of access to information is coupled by non-interpretability of the data received. The digital divide continues to widen because access to information, in and of itself, does not result into knowledge. The digital divide can only be bridged when content and technology is geared towards local needs and priorities while enhancing capabilities of end users to make productive use of the data.

The Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI), paragraph 58, specifically calls on WSIS to “consider Small Island developing States concerns and their participation in the Summit process”. AOSIS strongly supports SIDS participation in various WSIS processes to ensure adequate involvement in ICT deployment strategies.

In order that the objectives of WSIS are achieved, it is critical that the voices of diverse developing countries are heard, and WSIS committees and processes are more inclusive and transparent. Paragraph 114 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda outlined the need to promote ICT infrastructure development and use, as well as capacity-building, particularly in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, including rapid universal and affordable access to the internet. In order that this goal is fulfilled, LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS need to be adequately represented in various WSIS committees and be included in decision-making processes. SIDS have limited participation in Geneva, which makes participation in those forums challenging. Greater representation will be key to achieving ambitious goals and efforts for inclusion must be ensured.

ICTs play a critical role in climate change and disaster risk management. WSIS should look into leveraging technological capabilities in order to monitor, predict, mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. These can be achieved through developing “ICT networks, early warning systems, remote sensing, computer based systems for mapping and wireless technologies” as mentioned in the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation, paragraph 11(i).

AOSIS strongly supports the creation of regional hubs to facilitate exchange of experiences and capacities in order to advance knowledge sharing. Especially for SIDS, regional access to information on best practices, policy mechanisms and programs for disaster risk reduction is crucial to effectively and easily respond to natural disasters and environmental hazards.

WSIS review process must also look into greater integration with the post 2015 development agenda and align ICT and Internet connectivity with the implementation of the sustainable development goals.