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

Official Form for Written Submissions

A. Your Information

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B. Formal Input

This is a joint submission that has been endorsed by the following civil society organisations: Association for Progressive Communications (APC); Bytes for All, Pakistan; CTS/FGV (Brazil); Global Partners Digital, UK; ICT Watch, Indonesia; iNGO European Media Platform, Ukraine; KICTANet, Kenya; Media Matters for Democracy, Pakistan; Media Foundation for West Africa, Ghana; Public Knowledge, USA.

(1) To what extent has progress been made on the vision of the people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society in the ten years since the WSIS?

We understand the people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society as one which is respectful of human rights, promotes gender equality and empowers vulnerable and marginalised groups including minority groups. It is also a society where ICTs contribute to sustainable socio-economic development including through transparent, accountable, inclusive governance structures. In the ten years since the WSIS, ICTs have contributed to increased productivity and the generation of economic growth. They have also offered the opportunity for the realisation of human rights in many parts of the world, and people around the world depend on ICTs to express themselves freely, as well as share and access information with many positive social, economic and political implications. Yet there are many continuing challenges, such as the use of ICTs in ways that violate and compromise human rights and which inhibit the progress towards achieving the WSIS vision.

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

(2) What are the challenges to the implementation of WSIS outcomes?

Despite the progress mentioned above, particularly in terms of improvement in global connectivity and access, a number of challenges remain. **The persistence and changing nature of the digital divide** continues to present a major challenge to the achievement of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society.

The WSIS action lines have contributed to a deepened understanding and significance of ICTs for development among policy and decision makers and some countries have made progress in implementing the action lines through tangible policies, projects and services. Yet the **fast-moving and dynamic nature of ICT development means that changes are unpredictable** and this has affected the implementation of the WSIS outcomes. New trends in technology and business models that have developed around them have brought about new challenges in achieving a people-centered, human rights respecting Information Society. For instance, as noted in the CSTD report "Implementing WSIS outcomes: A Ten-Year Review", the existing targets are not comprehensive enough, and are overly concerned with connectivity and infrastructure access rather than the development of meaningful and effective ways of using ICTs that can lead to socioeconomic development and the respect of human rights. Implications of these emerging trends need to be taken into account in the WSIS framework beyond 2015.

Another persisting challenge is the **difficulty in monitoring and measuring the success of implementation of WSIS outcomes**. The WSIS targets provided a starting point but as the CSTD report "Implementing WSIS outcomes: A Ten-Year Review" notes, "the WSIS targets adopted in 2003 have a number of limitations as tools for measuring the development of an Information Society ...These result from the weaknesses in the range of targets selected, in the modalities of measurement and availability of data".

In relation to internet governance, although the past ten years have seen greater acknowledgement and improvement of multistakeholder cooperation, there is a **need to further strengthen and develop governance frameworks that are open, inclusive and participatory**, and especially which support new and diverse voices from developing countries.

(3) What should be the priorities in seeking to achieve WSIS outcomes and progress towards the Information Society, taking into account emerging trends?

In order to address the above challenges, the WSIS framework beyond 2015 will need to further strengthen the areas where progress has been made, address the remaining gaps, and mitigate new and emerging challenges:

Continued effort needs to be made to bridge the digital divide with **particular attention paid to the its changing nature**; although there has been an increase in access, there is huge variation in the quality of connection and the use of ICTs, which in many cases mirror existing patterns of social and economic disadvantage for example in relation to rural and urban divides, level of educational qualification, gender inequality and marginalisation of minority groups.

Far greater efforts therefore need to be made to **improve inclusiveness and reduce digital divides through affordable access and reduction of the gender gap**. Yet, bridging the digital divide will require more than increasing access to ICT and internet infrastructure; it will require **investment into education and capacity building**, including ICT skills, **the promotion of enabling policy and regulatory environments that are human-rights respecting** and digital literacy for all so that the full benefit of access can be realised. For this reason, improved and innovative financial mechanisms as well as adequate and sustainable investments remain a priority in order to continue to meet the challenges of ICT for development.

In order for the WSIS framework to fully and adequately address the changing nature of the ICT environment, it will be necessary to **adopt short-term, measurable targets accompanied with concrete benchmarks and indicators** which are framed in a way that reflects rapid changes in technology and services. These targets should **contribute to long-term, comprehensive, and strategic goals for ICTs for development**, which reflect and support the broader post 2015 development agenda.

In terms of **improving measurability of implementation of WSIS outcomes**, measurable targets should be identified, taking into account the recommendations of the Partnership for ICT Development. Furthermore, the last ten years have seen an exponential growth in the amount and quality of data, as well as significant advances in tools and technologies to collect and analyse it. These advances should be fully leveraged in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes beyond 2015.

The WSIS beyond 2015 should work to **further strengthen governance frameworks that are open, inclusive and participatory** at national, regional and global levels. Governance mechanisms at all levels should be continuously made more democratic, accountable and transparent, including through the use of the very technology that they are governing. To this effect, lessons from open and e-governance fields should be considered and leveraged, including through greater use of data-driven decision-making. To increase participation of actors from developing countries, capacity building programmes and financial support should be explicitly supported. At the global level, the WSIS should renew its commitment to continuing and strengthening the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

(4) What are general expectations from the WSIS + 10 High Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly?

We expect the High Level Event to **reaffirm the WSIS vision** and **acknowledge the ICTs as both transformative and facilitative tools for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. In order to advance the WSIS vision beyond 2015, the Meeting should commit to developing practical steps that address the opportunities and challenges outlined above. We trust that meaningful input from stakeholders will be welcomed in all stages of the process from the preparatory phase to the High Level Meeting. Consistent with the WSIS commitments, we expect the High Level Meeting to reflect an open and inclusive approach to ensure that views from the broad WSIS stakeholder community are taken into account in the outcomes.

(5) What shape should the outcome document take?

The outcome should be a focused political document, which contains the following elements:

- Reiteration of the basic principles of the Geneva Declaration and of the Tunis Agenda;
- Renewed political commitment for achieving the WSIS vision;
- Reaffirmation of the importance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in achieving the WSIS vision, including through recalling Human Rights Council Resolutions A/HRC/20/8 (on The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet), A/HRC/24/4 (on The right to development), and UNGA Resolution A/RES/68/167 (on The right to privacy in the digital age).
- Endorsement of the assessment of implementation of the WSIS outcomes as presented in the UNCTAD/CSTD report: "Implementing WSIS outcomes: A Ten-Year Review"
- Endorsement of the outcomes of the UNESCO WSIS+10 Multi-Stakeholder Event; the ITU-led WSIS+10 High Level Event; and the UNESCO Connecting the Dots Conference;
- Noting the UNGA resolution 69/204 on Information and communications technologies for development;
- Renewed commitment to open, inclusive, and participatory approaches to governance;
- Renewal of the IGF mandate, for at least 10 years, and a commitment to its continuous improvement, including by drawing on recommendations made by the CSTD Working Group on Improvements to the IGF;

- Recognition of the remaining challenges in achieving the WSIS vision;
- Agreement on way forward to develop clear and practical measures for implementing ICTs for development within the WSIS framework;
- Recognition of the importance of aligning the WSIS framework with the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).