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| Summary of the WSIS High-Level Dialogue: Multistakeholder Partnerships Driving Digital Transformation at the IGF 2023 | |
| **Purpose**  The document provides a summary of the WSIS High-Level Dialogue on Multistakeholder Partnerships Driving Digital Transformation at the IGF 2023.  **Action required**  Members are invited to **note** the document.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **References**   * <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/107> * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka4VFAWeSU4> | |

The WSIS High-Level Dialogue on Multistakeholder Partnerships Driving Digital Transformation took place on Sunday, October 8, 2023 as the Day 0 session of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) 2023 in Kyoto, Japan. The session was co-organised by the International Telecommunication Union and Government of Japan. The session, which was well-attended, was held in Annex Hall 2 at Kyoto International Conference Center, which can accommodate up to 200 attendees.

The session started with a video message from Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, former Secretary-General of ITU. He highlighted the organisation of two phases of the WSIS in 2003 and 2005, emphasising its multistakeholder approach. While acknowledging the progress made in achieving WSIS goals, he also noted ongoing challenges and the need for a more efficient approach to address emerging issues.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Secretary-General of ITU, stressed the critical significance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the urgent need for a unified global effort through the WSIS Action Lines, given that only 15% of the SDG targets are currently on track. She highlighted the remarkable impact of multistakeholder collaboration within WSIS, particularly in driving digital transformation. Ms. Bogdan-Martin urged active participation in both the WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event and its Open Consultation Process, concluding with a call for collective efforts and partnerships to establish digital transformation as a central pillar of the global rescue plan for the SDGs.

The panel discussion then commenced and divided into two topics: (i) *Identifying achievement and gaps in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines for the past 20 years and developing a common vision for the future of WSIS beyond 2025*; and (ii) *Strengthening digital collaborations and global partnerships and creating an accessible and equitable digital landscape for all, leaving no one behind*.

**Topic 1: Identifying achievement and gaps in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines for the past 20 years and developing a common vision for the future of WSIS beyond 2025**

The first topic of the panel discussion featured four panellists: *H.E. Mr. Hiroshi Yoshida, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan*; *H.E. Mr. Nizar Ben Neji, Minister of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies, Tunisia*; *Mr. Robert Opp, Chief Digital Officer at UNDP*; and *Ms. Anriette Esterhuysen, Senior Advisor on internet governance, policy advocacy, and strategic planning at the Association for Progressive Communications*.

Ms. Bogdan Martin set the context of this first topic by highlighting how WSIS has stood the test of time for the past 20 years, evolving from an idea into a well-established, inclusive implementation framework. The upcoming WSIS+20 review presents an opportunity to assess how WSIS can adapt to address new digital challenges and opportunities. Through collaborative efforts with UNESCO, UNDP, and UNCSTD, a joint preparatory process for the review has been initiated to avoid duplication and enhance coordination. It is important for all stakeholders to integrate the insights from the WSIS framework into other UN processes, such as Our Common Agenda, the Global Digital Compact, and the Summit of the Future, aiming to find synergies and align WSIS outcomes with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as closely as possible.

H.E. Mr. Hiroshi Yoshida, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan began by extending a warm welcome to all participants to Kyoto. He underlined the importance of the WSIS Action Lines framework for global digital cooperation. He acknowledged achievements in bridging the digital divide but noted that 2.6 billion people remain unconnected. Mr. Yoshida emphasised the need to continually adapt to rapidly advancing technologies and work toward the WSIS Action Line goals, particularly in light of the forthcoming WSIS+20 review in 2025.

H.E. Mr. Nizar Ben Neji, Minister of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies, Tunisia emphasised the need for a global effort to reduce disparities in ICTs development, particularly focusing on three areas: updating ICTs legislation at the national level, expanding network infrastructure to underserved regions, and addressing digital illiteracy through education. Mr. Ben Neji stressed the significance of trust and confidence in ICTs, covering aspects from recognising digital content to addressing cybercriminal activities. He also highlighted the importance of legal frameworks, technical validation, and consumer protection in building trust in electronic services.

Mr. Robert Opp, Chief Digital Officer at UNDP highlighted the importance of aligning WSIS with global processes, such as the Global Digital Compact and the Summit of the Future, to ensure continued relevance. He discussed the need for a whole-of-society approach to digital transformation, addressing fragmentation and promoting interoperable and open systems. Mr. Opp also underscored the importance of a people-centered approach and digital capacity, enabling individuals to engage safely and meaningfully with technology while understanding their rights and responsibilities.

Ms. Anriette Esterhuysen, Senior Advisor on internet governance, policy advocacy, and strategic planning at the Association for Progressive Communications discussed the enduring importance of WSIS. She highlighted WSIS’ role as an essential platform for civil society to collaborate with governments, enabling effective engagement and ensuring accountability. Ms. Esterhuysen emphasised the positive potential of ICTs and the need to focus on the unconnected while considering gender, climate change, and financing. Ms. Esterhuysen stressed the importance of updating WSIS while preserving its core principles and involving various UN agencies, including UNDP. She also encouraged building on existing collaborative models and deepening multistakeholder participation rather than reinventing the process.

**Topic 2: Strengthening digital collaborations and global partnerships and creating an accessible and equitable digital landscape for all, leaving no one behind**

The second topic of the panel discussion featured five distinguished panellists: *H.E. Mr. Nezar Patria, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Communications and Informatics, Indonesia*; *H.E. Ms. Agnė Vaiciukevičiūtė, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Lithuania*; *Amb. Thomas Schneider, Ambassador and Director of International Affairs at the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM), Switzerland*; *Ms. Maria Fernanda Garza, Chair of the International Chamber of Commerce*; and *Mr. Omurbek Abdullaev, Youth Envoy representing ITU Generation Connect from Kyrgyzstan*.

Ms. Bogdan Martin set the context of the second topic by reaffirming that WSIS is digital cooperation in action, uniting diverse stakeholders to harness the potential of technology for achieving the SDGs. She emphasised the challenge of harnessing meaningful partnerships to prevent anyone from being left behind in a rapidly evolving digital future. She expressed anticipation for ideas on strengthening digital collaboration as the WSIS platform and process continue to develop.

H.E. Mr. Nezar Patria, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Communications and Informatics, Indonesia emphasised the significance of preparing society for the disruptive impacts of emerging technologies, ranging from cybersecurity threats to shifts in business models and workforce automation. He also stressed the need to establish a level playing field for fair competition, balance diverse interests in the technology domain through governance, and prioritize collaborative innovation. He advocated for multilateral collaboration facilitated by platforms like the IGF to shape tangible, community-driven digital policies. In conclusion, he highlighted the importance of collective efforts in creating a better digital future for all.

H.E. Ms. Agnė Vaiciukevičiūtė, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Lithuania underlined strong support for the current multistakeholder model in digital collaboration and stressed the importance of partnerships in global digital initiatives. Ms. Vaiciukevičiūtė cited the EU's experience in involving various stakeholders in legislative processes as an effective example of multi-stakeholder engagement. She expressed the importance of shared experiences and collaborations to promote global digital inclusion and prevent emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, from unintentionally worsening digital exclusions.

Amb. Thomas Schneider, Ambassador and Director of International Affairs at the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM), Switzerland discussed the importance of building trust and prioritising local community needs in the context of digital collaboration. He highlighted the role of the WSIS and IGF in fostering inclusivity and giving voices to individuals who may not have access to other platforms. He commended the ITU and UNESCO for promoting inclusive discussions on digital issues and called for continued support for the WSIS+20 process to ensure that all voices are heard in shaping digital policy guidance.

Ms. Maria Fernanda Garza, Chair of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) highlighted the role of ICC in the WSIS process. She underscored the need for meaningful connectivity beyond mere internet access, emphasising the importance of multistakeholder collaboration, stable legal and regulatory frameworks, open markets, and holistic policy approaches. The ICC's focus is on creating an enabling environment that supports investment, stimulates competition, and respects local cultures while fostering open and inclusive digital cooperation for global prosperity.

Mr. Omurbek Abdullaev, Youth Envoy representing ITU Generation Connect from Kyrgyzstan addressed the digital divide and highlighted the importance of providing young people with the opportunity to participate in high-level discussions and conferences. He emphasised the need to give a chance to young individuals with innovative ideas to help bridge the global digital gap.

To conclude the session, the moderator, Ms. Gitanjali Sah, Strategy and Policy Coordinator, ITU invited all panellists to provide a one-sentence summary of WSIS.

Documentation of the session (*photos and recording*) is available at: <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/107>.