ITU CWG WSIS&SDG Call for Inputs on the WSIS+20 Review: Response

Response 40 – 23/12/2024 13:00

Respondent

1. Organization name

Open Data Charter

2. Organization type

Civil Society

3. Organization country

Argentina

Implementation of the WSIS Process

4. What are the **main achievements** of the implementation of the WSIS process in the past 20 years?

The WSIS process has brought significant global awareness to the importance of ICT access for socio-economic development, resulting in a growing alignment on digital policy frameworks. Achievements include a notable expansion in connectivity, especially within developing regions, as WSIS initiatives have worked to enhance broadband infrastructure and mobile internet access, though gaps persist. Key efforts have focused on digital inclusion, with programs targeting vulnerable groups like youth, rural populations, and marginalized communities, as well as promoting digital literacy initiatives that have helped integrate millions into the digital economy.

The WSIS process has also facilitated greater collaboration across governments, organizations, and stakeholders to address the digital divide, recognizing the particular challenges faced by women and young people in developing countries. As a result, the percentage of internet users has grown from 12.4% in 2003 to over 64% in 2023, marking substantial progress in bridging the digital divide.

5. What are ITUs main contributions towards the implementation of the WSIS Process in 20 Years?

Over the past 20 years, the ITU has played a key role in the WSIS process, primarily by leading global efforts to establish secure ICT infrastructures through its facilitation of WSIS Action Lines C2 (infrastructure) and C5 (cybersecurity) of the Tunis Agenda.

ITU has driven cybersecurity and trust-building initiatives, helping countries adopt frameworks and standards that enhance security for ICT systems. It has also championed global standards for scalable, reliable ICT infrastructures, facilitating better interoperability and accessibility worldwide.

Additionally, ITU's work in spectrum management has been essential for coordinating global telecommunications, supporting reliable networks across borders. Recognizing the importance of inclusion, ITU has actively promoted digital skills initiatives aimed at addressing the gender gap and empowering young people with digital literacy.

6. The WSIS process stands as a strong example of global digital cooperation in action for over two decades now. How can we ensure that this inclusive multistakeholder model is sustained and further strengthened?

To sustain and enhance the WSIS multistakeholder model, it is crucial to empower local, national, and regional stakeholders, allowing them to take ownership of digital development and tailor solutions to their unique socio-economic needs. Continuous feedback mechanisms, where civil society, the private sector, and government stakeholders can review and shape the WSIS process, are essential for adapting to emerging challenges.

Expanding capacity-building programs that specifically target marginalized groups and rural communities can help bridge representation gaps and foster broader, more inclusive participation. Additionally, improved data-sharing among stakeholders would create a transparent system for tracking progress, identifying needs, and refining WSIS initiatives based on evidence. It would be interesting, in terms of capacity building, to reinforce friendly communication about the processes, and to train CSOs who are not directly involved in them so that they can better understand the opportunities for involvement and advocacy.

7. What are the challenges that remain in the implementation of the WSIS process?

Despite the progress made, several challenges remain. Many rural and remote areas continue to face high costs or limited access to connectivity, which undermines equitable access to ICTs. Digital infrastructure sustainability suffers different challenges, as maintenance, upgrades, and cybersecurity measures require ongoing resources, which can be especially scarce in low-income regions.

Resistance to the multistakeholder governance model in some areas limits progress, as certain regions are hesitant to involve civil society and the private sector in ICT development. Also, rapid digital expansion has introduced cybersecurity threats that often outpace available protections, particularly in developing countries.

Digital literacy and skills gaps persist, underscoring the need for comprehensive education initiatives to empower individuals to fully leverage ICTs for social and economic opportunities.

Another challenge are the rapid technological changes: keeping pace with advancements such as AI, blockchain, and 5G requires continuous adaptation. This is also connected with the

need for ethical and legal frameworks: many countries lack robust frameworks to address the ethical implications of emerging technologies.

Coordination challenges also exist. Ensuring effective collaboration among governments, private sector players, and civil society remains complex. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach, involving governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society, and academia. Efforts should prioritize inclusivity, capacity building, and sustainable development while fostering trust and innovation in ICT ecosystems.

WSIS Action Lines

8. Which specific Action Lines have had the most significant impact, and why?

In terms of impact, several WSIS Action Lines have played pivotal roles in advancing the information society, each addressing distinct but interconnected areas. Among them, Action Line C2 (Information and Communication Infrastructure) has been crucial, as infrastructure forms the foundation of all digital connectivity, enabling both individuals and organizations in even the most remote areas to access online resources. But Action Line C3: Access to Information and Knowledge is particularly powerful because it addresses the core goal of digital inclusion by promoting equitable access to information. This line fosters open access to knowledge, which is essential in bridging digital divides by ensuring that individuals can participate in the knowledge economy, regardless of their geographic or socio-economic backgrounds. By supporting open-access initiatives, multilingual content, and digital repositories, C3 empowers people with the information necessary to make informed decisions, learn new skills, and engage in civic life. Access to knowledge is the basis for informed communities and individuals, and in this way, C3 amplifies the benefits of connectivity achieved through other Action Lines by ensuring information flows are accessible and useful to a broad audience.

9. Considering that the WSIS outcomes have demonstrated their relevance and applicability to new and emerging areas, how can the implementation of the WSIS principles and corresponding WSIS Action Lines be enhanced to effectively address these topics?

To enhance the implementation of WSIS principles and Action Lines to address new and emerging digital topics, it would be strategic to integrate adaptability and flexibility into the WSIS framework. Rapid advancements in technology, like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and the Internet of Things (IoT), are reshaping the digital landscape and require a responsive approach.

Promotion of ethical standards for emerging technologies is crucial nowadays. WSIS could develop frameworks or guidelines focused on ethical standards in emerging fields like AI, data privacy, and algorithmic transparency. This emphasis would align with the existing WSIS goal of equitable information access and responsible ICT development, ensuring that digital transformations are both safe and equitable.

Also, it is important to strengthen multistakeholder partnerships by deepening collaboration with private-sector innovators, civil society, and academia, WSIS can ensure that it remains aligned with the latest advancements and societal impacts of technologies. These partnerships can bring in expertise from emerging fields like AI ethics, digital security, and human-centered design, helping to adapt WSIS principles to new contexts.

10. Have you any suggestions and inputs on the WSIS+20 Review Action Lines, highlighting key milestones, challenges and emerging trends beyond 2025 prepared by the WSIS Action Line facilitators.
https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Home/About#actionLines

Key milestones:

Achieve near-universal access to affordable and high-quality internet, especially in least-developed countries (LDCs), rural areas, and marginalized communities. This includes addressing both infrastructure challenges and the affordability of services, as internet access is foundational to education, economic participation, and social inclusion.

Develop harmonized global standards for data privacy, cybersecurity, and internet governance to address fragmentation. As digital technologies continue to evolve, the lack of coherent, cross-border regulations poses a significant risk to the security, privacy, and trustworthiness of digital ecosystems. Therefore, international cooperation to create these standards is essential for reducing fragmentation and ensuring that global networks are secure and accessible.

Scale up ICTs to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in education, healthcare, agriculture, and disaster management. Technology can revolutionize and highly improve overall quality of life, especially in developing regions by making these services more efficient to be delivered, accessible and inclusive.

Examples: In education, technology can enhance learning outcomes by providing remote access to educational content, online training platforms, and digital tools that support personalized learning, bridging the gap for students in rural or underserved areas.

In agriculture, technology such as precision farming, weather forecasting tools, and digital marketplaces can significantly increase productivity, enhance food security, and improve supply chain efficiencies, empowering small-scale farmers and fostering sustainable agricultural practices.

In disaster management, ICTs can enable real-time monitoring, early warning systems, and rapid deployment of aid, helping communities prepare for and recover from natural disasters.

Establish ethical frameworks and guidelines for AI, blockchain, 5G/6G, and quantum computing deployment to ensure equitable benefits. While these technologies offer significant potential for progress, their deployment must be guided by clear ethical principles to prevent misuse, ensure fairness, and protect human rights, particularly in relation to data privacy, bias, and security.

Fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration among governments, the private sector, civil society, and academia is a key milestone. This collaboration will be essential to driving innovation, developing inclusive policies, and ensuring that technological advancements are

equitable and accessible to all, bridging the gap between those with and without access to digital resources. By fostering collective efforts, we can ensure that all voices are heard in shaping the digital future.

Additionally, as mentioned in other responses, it would be ideal to align and collaborate with the implementation of the Global Digital Compact to address the existing challenges of coordination.

Challenges

Digital divide. The digital divide remains a significant challenge, particularly as connectivity becomes increasingly essential for education, work, and access to services. Despite advances in infrastructure, marginalized communities in rural areas and low-income nations still face barriers to reliable internet access and digital literacy. Addressing this gap requires collaborative investment in affordable technologies, localized training programs, and inclusive policies that ensure equitable access to digital tools.

Cybersecurity

The rapid growth of digital services has heightened cybersecurity risks and raised critical questions about data privacy. Cyberattacks on infrastructure, businesses, and individuals continue to escalate, while laws regulating the use and protection of personal data often lag behind technological advances. Achieving a balance between innovation and robust security frameworks is essential to building public trust in digital ecosystems, especially through global cooperation

WSIS Action Line for advancing the SDGs

11. How can the alignment between the WSIS Action Lines and SDGs be strengthened towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Strengthening the alignment between WSIS Action Lines and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires an integrated approach that embeds ICT strategies within national and global development agendas. Governments and stakeholders should explicitly link WSIS Action Lines to specific SDG targets, emphasizing ICTs as enablers of progress in education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), health (SDG 3), and economic growth (SDG 8). Enhanced multi-stakeholder partnerships, including the private sector and civil society, can drive innovation and resource mobilization, while capacity-building programs ensure equitable access to ICT benefits. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks must measure the dual progress on Action Lines and SDGs, fostering data-driven decision-making to address gaps and accelerate impact, especially in underserved regions. By prioritizing inclusivity, affordability, and sustainability, ICTs can effectively bridge divides and catalyze the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Future Vision and WSIS beyond 2025

12. How can we further strengthen multistakeholder platforms such as the WSIS Forum as the platform for digital development and IGF as the platform for governance and policy issues?

Strengthening multistakeholder platforms like the WSIS Forum and IGF requires a focus on inclusivity, transparency, and measurable outcomes.

The WSIS Forum's role as a gathering place for governments and multistakeholder actors can be further strengthened by fostering synergies with the IGF. WSIS should draw on the policy ideas and best practices developed in the IGF and use them as inputs for discussions on actionable strategies, frameworks, and global commitments. A shared roadmap or agenda could enhance coherence and streamline efforts toward shared objectives. Encouraging structured collaboration between the two platforms, such as joint task forces or shared agendas, can ensure continuity and coherence in addressing global digital challenges.

Ensure diverse representation by actively involving underrepresented groups such as small and developing nations, marginalized communities, and grassroots organizations. This can be achieved through financial support for participation, virtual engagement options, and capacity-building initiatives to empower voices from all sectors.

Driving Measurable Outcomes: establish clear, actionable goals for each platform's discussions and create mechanisms to track their implementation over time. Regularly publishing progress reports and case studies demonstrating the impact of policy recommendations can help maintain accountability and build trust among stakeholders.

Coordinate efforts with the Global Digital Compact implementation processes to enhance the alignment and coordination of various digital initiatives within the UN framework.

13. How can the implementation of the WSIS process and the Pact for the Future and its Global Digital Compact be aligned to achieve shared goals?

Aligning the implementation of the WSIS process with the Pact for the Future and its Global Digital Compact requires integrating their shared principles of inclusivity, sustainability, and digital equity into coherent frameworks. This can be achieved by mapping WSIS Action Lines directly to the goals of the Pact and the Compact, ensuring that digital technologies are harnessed to uphold human rights, bridge the digital divide, and promote sustainable development. Joint monitoring mechanisms can track progress across these initiatives, fostering accountability and data-driven decision-making. Multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential to harmonize policy priorities, mobilize resources, and share best practices globally. By focusing on shared objectives such as universal connectivity, digital literacy, and ethical technology use, these frameworks can collectively empower individuals and communities, driving equitable digital transformation while advancing the 2030 Agenda.

14. What are the key emerging digital trends and topics to be considered by ITU in the WSIS+20 review and future vision beyond 2025?

In the WSIS+20 review and future vision beyond 2025, the ITU should consider emerging digital trends such as the expansion of 5G and the advent of 6G, the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI), and the governance of transformative technologies like quantum computing, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT). Addressing the digital divide through universal connectivity, affordable access, and digital literacy is crucial, alongside tackling issues of data governance, privacy, and cybersecurity in an increasingly interconnected world. Sustainability must be prioritized, focusing on energy-efficient ICTs, e-waste management, and leveraging digital tools for climate action. The ITU should also address the societal impacts of automation, ensuring workforce readiness and inclusive participation in the digital economy. Strengthening global cooperation, policy harmonization, and multi-stakeholder engagement will be key to fostering an equitable, ethical, and sustainable information society that aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.