

Session Outcome Document

Data & Indicator Lab: Multistakeholder Dialogue on WSIS Action Lines, Indicators and Accountability

Global Initiative on the Future of the Internet (GIFI), European University Institute (EUI)

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<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2026/en/Agenda/Session/265>

Key Issues discussed

- Twenty years after WSIS, the session asked whether the indicators used to track the Action Lines actually reflect what those Action Lines set out to achieve, and where the underlying data is robust, thin, contested or missing.
- Data availability is mature for connectivity and infrastructure but far weaker for rights, governance quality, and newer issues such as AI accountability and algorithmic transparency, creating a structural bias in what can be evaluated.
- Headline indicators can flatter reality: the standard internet-penetration measure counts anyone who used the internet once in three months as “connected”, masking the gap between the hyper-connected and the barely connected, and allowing states to hide inequalities behind access figures.
- Many indexes measure state commitment rather than actual risk or practice, and the burden of monitoring demand-side and rights-sensitive data cannot fall on civil society alone; it needs to be built into national statistical systems.
- This asymmetry in data has direct policy consequences: what can be measured tends to shape what gets prioritised, and what gets prioritised is what gets funded, reported and politically rewarded, so a narrow indicator architecture produces narrow implementation roadmaps.
- Gender is treated as cross-cutting rather than as a dedicated measurement priority: there is no standalone gender Action Line and effectively no gender-specific indicators, even though sex-disaggregated data is collected unevenly across Action Lines and remains absent in many countries.
- The measurement question is institutional, not merely technical: deciding what to count, who counts it, and what a good result looks like is itself a governance choice, and fragmentation of data across agencies weakens accountability.
- The technical and civil-society communities already produce credible, relevant data, on network health and resilience, shutdowns, media freedom, digital rights and affordability, that is largely disconnected from the formal WSIS monitoring process, even as media freedom declines and internet shutdowns rise year on year while more people come online.
- The WSIS+20 outcome (A/RES/80/173) makes monitoring and measurement a core part of the review for the first time, mandating a systematic review of ICT measurement methodologies alongside a permanent IGF and national implementation roadmaps, and opening a defined window to strengthen the global measurement framework.

Key Outcomes of the session

- The Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development briefed the session on its new mandate under the WSIS+20 outcome (A/RES/80/173, paras 114–118) to conduct a systematic review of existing ICT indicators and methodologies and report findings to the CSTD in 2027, supported by the WSIS Action Line facilitators and the UN Statistical Commission.
- Participants confirmed that the Core List of ICT Indicators (50+ indicators, endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission) is now open for revision, and that all Action Lines are asked to submit measurement roadmaps to the same 2027 CSTD process.

- There was broad convergence that the next generation of indicators must move beyond basic access towards meaningful connectivity, quality and impact, including AI adoption and use, digital skills, safety and security, e-waste, data centres, and the connectivity of institutions and communities, not only individuals.
- The GIFI convenor presented the Internet Accountability Compass, which maps WSIS and Global Digital Compact commitments against existing datasets to make the commitment-versus-practice gap visible; it shows data strongest for connectivity and infrastructure (where states score higher) and weakest for rights and governance (where they score lower).
- Participants framed better measurement itself as a governance intervention and an essential pillar of the enabling environment under Action Line C6: the accountability ‘stack’ breaks without monitoring infrastructure, so credible monitoring and implementation review is a precondition for delivering all the Action Lines, not an optional add-on.
- A recurring, shared conclusion: multistakeholder governance also means multistakeholder monitoring, data and evaluation, and existing community-run measurement should be treated as a primary input to the formal review rather than an afterthought.
- An open call was issued for written submissions to the Partnership’s consultation (indicators@itu.int) on the systematic review, with a reminder that proposed indicators must be weighed against international comparability.

Key Recommendations and Forward-Looking Actions

- Make indicators more outcome-oriented: measure not only whether infrastructure exists, but whether access is affordable, meaningful, inclusive and rights-respecting in practice, and revisit headline measures such as internet penetration that obscure inequality by treating any recent use as being fully connected.
- Give gender data a clear home in the review: adopt sex-disaggregated and gender-transformative indicators that measure not only access but leadership, ownership, safety and participation, and address the countries where such data is still absent.
- Add an explicit accountability dimension for rights, AI and cybersecurity, measuring harm, redress and outcomes, not only capacity or commitment.
- Treat technical-community and civil-society evidence (network measurement, resilience, rights indices) as admissible, primary input to the WSIS measurement review, and strengthen national statistical systems and household surveys so the unconnected are counted.
- Engage directly with the Partnership’s 2026–27 systematic review, through written submissions and the consultation form, because this is where the baselines for the next cycle are effectively set, and ensure the revised Core List reflects rights and governance quality rather than replicating existing data biases.
- Learn from indicator-based accountability frameworks in other domains, the WTO Trade Policy Review Mechanism, the biennial transparency reports under Article 13 of the Paris Agreement, and the Universal Periodic Review on human rights, which show how structured review mechanisms can be built over time, even if imperfect.