

Global Digital Justice Forum's and IT for Change's Statement to the Co-Facilitators of the Global Digital Compact Process

IT for Change

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IT for Change's Merrin Muhammed Ashraf 's Input

Good day to all. I am Merrin, speaking on behalf of the Global Digital Justice Forum, a multisectoral group of development organizations, digital rights networks, trade unions, feminist groups, corporate watchdogs, and communication rights campaigners led by a digital justice vision, and IT for Change, an India-based not-for-profit organization, working on digital technologies and global justice. We thank you for the opportunity to present our inputs today.

The democratic and distributive integrity of our shared future hinges on the governance of our digital paradigm. The Global Digital Compact (GDC) is an opportunity for us to re-envision the human condition as digitality shapes the anthropocene.

From a Digital Development Tax, to public finance for digital infrastructure and public goods in developing countries, binding rules for Big Tech, and checks and balances to contain state excesses in digital society, deep-seated change is in order for a radical tomorrow. The internet should be reclaimed as a global knowledge and communication commons, disavowing surveillance capitalism and embracing the generative peer-networking affordances of the horizontal web of the hyperlink.

We seek a strong and central role for civil society and social movements in global-to-local digital policymaking. The ideal of a “networked multilateral arrangement” envisaged in the UN Secretary-General's policy brief on GDC needs a clear separation of roles, responsibilities, and powers of the different actors in distributed decision-making. Otherwise, multilateral policy spaces will be held hostage to a corporate takeover.

The GDC must achieve a consensus for a multilateral mandate on digitalization and sustainable human futures along the following key axes:

1. Initiating a treaty process on digital human rights that articulates the nature of individual and collective autonomy in the epoch of data and AI as well as the right to development for an equitable international data order.
2. Mobilizing dedicated public financing for development cooperation in digital infrastructure capabilities, including through ODA and international financial institutions;
3. Introducing a Digital Development Tax for a democratically governed Digital Solidarity Fund, entailing compulsory contributions from dominant digital services firms to finance public digital infrastructure in developing countries.

4. Designing a binding global governance regime for data, straddling economic and non-economic issues, operating on the principles of data flows with human rights and equity, recognizing data sovereignty as inextricably linked to development freedoms.
5. Setting up a dedicated institutional mechanism at the multilateral level for access and benefit sharing, akin to the Nagoya Protocol of the Convention on Biological Diversity, for fair benefit sharing in global data public goods.
6. Adopting a binding consensus at the multilateral level to institute accountability measures for Big Tech corporations, including their financing and taxation.
7. Evolving a binding multilateral framework to guide future trajectories of AI design, development, and use with mandatory ex-ante and ex-post assessments of risks to human rights and threats to peace and security; transparency measures that meet a high threshold of explainability; accountability measures geared at harm prevention over redress; non-discrimination benchmarks; and consultative mechanisms to better inform multilateral AI governance. Digital trade rules that prevent nation-states from enforcing transparency and accountability regulation on AI services and application providers must be rejected.
8. Internationalizing governance of Critical Internet Resources, the platformized cybersphere, and ICANN, in order to reclaim the Internet as a global communication commons
9. Harnessing the Internet and the social resource of data and data-based intelligence as a future-ready force for gender-transformative, ecologically compatible development, if Agenda 2030 is to be realized.

An empowered, coordinating agency for coherence across the multilateral system is non-negotiable to translate vision into concrete action.

Thank you!