

IT for Change's Inputs to the ITU's Open Consultation Process on the WSIS Forum

IT for Change

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1. Please share your suggestions for innovations that could be introduced in the structure and program of the WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event.

Multistakeholder spaces with a mix of actors could crowd out voices that challenge the mainstream consensus on digital technologies. The structure and program need to be attentive to worldviews and perspectives coming from the standpoint of the most disenfranchised. Formulaic methods to add women or youth or bring diversity by tokenistic means will not help in a critical and constructive stocktaking. It is important to connect to different UN agencies – across sectors and reach out to different scholar-practitioners across sectors to elicit their views on digitalization and digitality. This approach should complement digital domain expertise in the discussions.

2. The WSIS Forum is a UN global platform for multistakeholder implementation activities, information exchange, creation of knowledge, sharing of best practice, and to foster partnerships to advance development goals. Please suggest how the WSIS Forum can enhance its alignment with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), taking into account the outcomes of the [UNGA Overall WSIS Review \(A/RES/70/125\)](#).

The WSIS+15 review rightly acknowledged that new information and communication technologies were “significant enablers of sustainable development” (para 13) whose potential had to be realized through effective responses to the paradigmatic shift in global social and economic relations (para 17 and para 15) that they had catalyzed. In particular, the review underscored the “critical importance of expanding the participation of all countries, particularly developing countries, in the digital economy” (para 15) as a necessary step in harnessing the potential of the digital revolution for the implementation of Agenda 2030.

Today, a few years since the WSIS+15 review, we find ourselves in an extremely unequal global digital economy whose extractivist tendencies have intensified inequality between countries with the wealth generated by technological innovation accruing to a handful of platform companies and countries. In his policy brief on the Global Digital Compact, the UN Secretary-General warned that: “Inequality is rising. Enormous investments in technology have not been accompanied by spending on public education and infrastructure. Digital technology has led to massive gains in productivity and value, but these benefits are not resulting in shared prosperity. The wealth of those in the top 1% is growing exponentially: between 1995 and 2021, they accounted for 38% of the increase in global wealth, while the bottom 50% accounted

for only 2% [...] Digital technologies are accelerating the concentration of economic power in an ever-smaller group of elites and companies: the combined wealth of technology billionaires, USD 2.1 trillion in 2022, is greater than the annual gross domestic product of more than half of the Group of 20 economies” (p. 3).

The WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event must be responsive to this context by centering the issue of the data and innovation divide that is thwarting the right to development and socio-economic self-determination for the majority world. Pathways to human flourishing in the global digital economy and being true to the intent of the SDGs are predicated on tackling the systemic conditions that perpetuate an unequal and unjust world digital order. In particular, the WSIS+20 forum should focus on the following issues:

Issue 1. The intersections between infrastructural inequalities and lags in the realization of the SDGs, focusing on governance deficits in platform, data, and AI ecosystems.

Issue 2. Linkages between international economic law – trade, investment, IP, and taxation regimes – and global inequality in the digital paradigm.

Issue 3. The urgent imperative for democratic governance of the world digital order across all layers of the digital.

Issue 4. Learnings from public-private partnerships in digital infrastructure development, with a view to identify the limits of private sector investment, as well as digital public goods approaches implemented so far (with the intent to understand best practices in national capacity development, participatory methodologies, and human rights orientation).

Issue 5. Innovative public financing routes for digital infrastructure development in developing countries.

Issue 6. A new-age, inter-agency cooperation mechanism that can enable convergence on principles for data governance adequate to the new International Decade for Data that the UN Secretary-General has articulated (p. 16, Our Common Agenda policy brief), and its interlinkages with a rebooted Technology Facilitation Mechanism.

3. Please provide your suggestions for key topics and themes that should be included in the High-Level Segment of the WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event. These topics and themes should aim to maximize the impact and relevance of the Forum in light of current trends, while also considering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Overall WSIS Review conducted by the United Nations General Assembly.

A set of framing themes that acknowledges the critical role of democratic governance of the digital as vital to the technological path dependency of global development justice is much needed. Five inter-related themes, with specific topics under each, are highlighted below:

Theme 1. Digital Human Rights

- Emerging challenges to individual and collective human rights – as articulated in the ICCPR, ICESCR, and the Declaration on the Right to Development – taking into account the particularities of the digital paradigm
- Principles and norms for such digital human rights that are co-developed through public consultation and participation of communities
- International labor rights for a digitally-mediated reality – and protection of worker rights regardless of “the mode of work...against digital surveillance, arbitrary algorithmic decisions and loss of agency over their labour” (UNSG’s Policy Brief on the Global Digital Compact, p. 14)

Theme 2. Global Data Compact

- Approaches to data governance (for instance, an examination of the dominant US, China, and EU models) and a stocktaking of pros and cons in data governance approaches to identify foundational principles for data rights and equity
- A framework for “data flows with equity” (see, the [draft issues paper by UNCTAD](#))
- Guardrails and incentives for building an equitable global data commons in different sectors to enable the realization of the SDGs (health, agriculture, public services, etc.)

Theme 3. Internet as a Global Commons

- Governing the internet as a global public good without fragmentation by states or Big Tech corporations
- Openness, security, and interoperable network standards, as well as platform and data protocols to preserve the internet as a horizontal and decentralized global communications space

- Appropriate internationalization of Critical Internet Resources to realize the WSIS mandate of enhanced cooperation among all states

Theme 4. Inclusive and Democratic Global Digital Cooperation

- What global institutional arrangements will be adequate and appropriate for the digital transition and a new internationalism rooted in the well-being and harmonious coexistence of all
- How values of ‘inclusion’ and ‘democratic participation’ should be implemented in global digital governance processes, and how minority voices and standpoints can be centered
- Stocktaking of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and identifying reform areas for enhancing the effectiveness of the space as an inclusive forum for dialogue

4. Please propose some ideas on format to make the High-Level segment more dynamic and interactive.

The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society underscores democratic multistakeholderism as the critical principle for digital governance. The High-Level Segment must be designed in this spirit to ensure that governments and Big Tech do not dominate the debate, and MSMEs, communities of practice, civil society organizations, and social movements – especially from the Global South – and all other less powerful actors are given adequate time and space for effective participation.

A stocktaking of the WSIS+10 review by Global Partners Digital and the Centre for Communication Governance, National Law University in 2016 indicates that one of the key issues with the process was the ad-hoc nature of civil society participation. Learning from this experience, we recommend that there is robust institutionalization of civil society participation in the High-Level Segment:

- Time for civil society inputs should not be tokenistic – it is reduced to two minutes and lunchtime side events. The High-Level Segment must accommodate multiple civil society constituency perspectives that represent minority and dissenting notes – acknowledging the stakes that the most marginalized have in global digital governance.
- Funding to participate in the WSIS forum must be made available for both traditional development organizations expanding into digital issues, trade unions of tech workers and platform workers, as well as new-age digital rights organizations and tech activists working on digital commons, design justice, and reform of standards bodies from a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective.

5. How can local, national, and regional activities as well as innovative cross-sectoral partnerships for implementation become more visible at the WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event?

Through an open call for proposals to showcase learnings, applications from organizers of local, national, and regional efforts to build cross-sectoral partnerships for effective implementation of WSIS outcomes can be invited. A 'Learning Lab' format that focuses on a critical stocktaking and reflective assessment of these innovations, with time for audience interaction and questions, is better suited than a good practices showcase format.

The selection criteria should focus on:

- Extent of people's participation in the initiatives
- Community partnership in the experiment and innovative frameworks for this
- Commons-based approaches in digital infrastructure choices
- Relevance of initiatives to SDGs and promotion of the development-oriented digital society

6. How can we ensure more equal participation in the parallel workshops at the WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event?

Analysis of inclusiveness, equity, and diversity at the IGF over the years indicates that equal participation is both about ensuring geographic, stakeholder, ethnic, and gender diversity among attendees at workshops; and paying attention to marginalized and minority voices (LDCs, vulnerable communities, and so on) when shaping the agenda for the workshops.

7. What are the main achievements in the implementation of the [WSIS Action Lines](#) in the past 20 years?

C1. The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development

C2. Information and communication infrastructure

C3. Access to information and knowledge

C4. Capacity building

C5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs

C6. Enabling environment

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-government

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-business**C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-learning****C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-health****C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-employment****C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-environment****C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-agriculture****C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-science****C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity, and local content****C9. Media****C10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society**

For C1 to C10: The arc of technology has moved rapidly, with much promise for positive outcomes. However, the nature of social outcomes of digital technologies tends to depend on contextual factors and conditions. A people-oriented information society is still a distant dream, given the current structures of state and corporate control over digital technologies. We would, therefore, like to focus more on the next question to reflect on the current challenges.

C11. International and regional co-operation

Post the breakdown of the second Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation (2016-18) in finding a way out of the global stalemate on digital governance at the multilateral level, the UN Secretary-General initiated a number of steps. These attempts to continue the dialogue and find a way out of the impasse led to the establishment of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation co-chaired by Jack Ma and Melinda Gates (2018-19), publication of the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap on Global Digital Cooperation (2020), and most recently, the May 2023 policy brief on the UN Global Digital Compact (GDC) that calls for an intergovernmental agreement on an "open, free, secure, inclusive and human-centred digital future". The GDC itself is proposed to be annexed to the Pact of the Future. As the Ministerial Roundtable at the 2023 WSIS Forum has acknowledged, what is needed is to establish the complementary nature of the GDC with the WSIS review. This is required in order to ensure that the new digital governance vision agreed to in the international arena also continues to be grounded in the first principles of a people-centered, development-oriented, inclusive information society as envisioned in the WSIS Geneva Principles.

Agencies, including, UNESCO, ITU, and UNCTAD, have moved the needle on global digital governance issues – working towards normative and rights-based frameworks. UNESCO, for example, came out with a model set of guidelines for the governance of digital platforms in 2023, to safeguard freedom of expression and information integrity in the digital communication sphere.

8. What are the key challenges in implementing the [WSIS Action Lines](#) and what areas that have not been adequately captured by the framework of the existing 11 WSIS Action Lines that would need to be addressed beyond 2025?

C1. The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development

The ‘ICTs for development’ agenda today, comprises the establishment of foundational digital infrastructure (network, platform, and data infrastructure) for core economic and social activities – fair platform marketplaces, interoperable and truly public social media, and so on. Without committed international public financing for Digital Public Goods, low and middle-income countries (LMICs) and least developed countries (LDCs) face uphill challenges in securing their digital futures. Rising debt and fiscal constraints also present a huge challenge in this regard. The prevalent financing model for digital infrastructure development, leaning heavily on private sector involvement, blended finance, and multistakeholder partnerships, has not proved to be adequately robust in tackling digital exclusion. Regulatory gaps have seen the [erosion and cannibalization of the digital commons and public infrastructures](#) by powerful transnational platform companies.

C2. Information and communication infrastructure

The connectivity/digital divide is still wide open, even as newer infrastructural and innovation divides that exacerbate inequality in the global digital economy have emerged.

As the UN Secretary-General [noted](#), “Two decades after the World Summit on the Information Society, the digital divide is still a gulf”. Only 36% of the population in LDCs used the Internet in 2022, compared to 66% globally. About 17% of the population in LDCs did not even have access to a fixed or mobile broadband network. Only [two LDCs](#) have met the UN Broadband Commission’s affordability 2% target. The connectivity divide maps onto pre-existing fault lines of social exclusion, with women, low-income, minority language, and older populations being more likely to face accessibility barriers. The pace of progress towards the goal of universal and equal connectivity has clearly been slow.

The infrastructural and innovation divide is highly stark, resulting in many developing countries being unable to reap the development dividends of digitalization. [Just two countries](#) (the United States and

China) account for half of the world's hyperscale data centers, 70% of global AI talent, and almost 90% of the market capitalization of the world's largest digital platforms. While monthly global data traffic is forecast to grow by more than 400% by 2026, activity is concentrated among a [few global players](#). In this new configuration, developing countries find themselves in [subordinate positions](#) by becoming mere providers of raw data to global digital platforms, while having to pay for the digital intelligence obtained from their data.

C3. Access to information and knowledge

The private and closed content streams of mainstream platform models have destroyed the generative web of hyperlinks that was founded on pluralistic openness. The dominant business model of platforms built on surveillance advertising deploys algorithmic personalization, amplifying and intensifying social bias and intersectional discrimination, and [exacerbating the exclusion](#) of women, gender minorities, oppressed castes, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups. It incentivizes the spread of disinformation and misinformation, thus jeopardizing the sanctity of information and knowledge as a public good.

While recent trends in AI development – particularly the advent of generative AI technologies – have been celebrated as ushering in a new information and knowledge paradigm, there are numerous concerns that have emerged about its epistemic injustice and [colonial appropriation of traditional knowledge and indigenous cultures](#). Furthermore, in any process of AI development, there is a high risk of the inherent bias and glaring omissions in datasets – mirroring the intersectional connectivity divides – becoming reified into 'objective' truths, [denying the meaningful representation of the majority world](#) in the new regime of data-based truth.

C4. Capacity building

Many young people in developing countries, especially women, are at risk of being left behind, and excluded from emerging employment opportunities of the ongoing digital transition. Women also lack the requisite digital skills as well as the foundational literacy and education essential for higher order digital fluency and competence. Less than 40% of youth in high- and upper-middle-income countries have minimum digital literacy proficiency. Data are unavailable in most low- and middle-income countries, where [digital skills gaps are likely the largest](#). The populations of the Majority World are not adequately prepared to respond to the labor market transitions that technology-induced job displacement is likely to catalyze in the medium term.

C5. Building confidence and security in use of ICTs

The confidence that individuals and organizations have in the security, privacy, and ethical practices of digital technologies is crucial for shaping decisions and actions in the digital world. However, digital trust is currently at an all-time low due to various factors, including [geopolitical polarization](#), the consolidation of the surveillance state and its digital panopticon, and new challenges to safety, privacy, and data security. New technological developments – 5G, Web 3.0, facial recognition systems, dark patterns, gaming on platform services, and so on – are yet to be satisfactorily addressed in many jurisdictions through effective regulation.

C6. Enabling environment

There is a stalemate at the global level as far as the development of a people's digital constitutionalism is concerned. The potential for democratic participation of various constituencies in public policymaking has been distorted and reduced to “equal footing multistakeholderism”, that is, a [flawed notion](#) that a mere aggregation of various private stakes at the decision-making table would somehow enable the consolidation of the public interest. This trend has given corporations disproportionate power in public policy processes and fragmented and fractured the cartography of digital governance – with a multiplicity of international approaches across sectors and arenas (including trade, food, ecological systems, labor, and more). It has also enabled the powerful to [consolidate their position](#) through forum shopping in different policy spaces, particularly through digital trade agreements.

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-government

No specific input.

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-business

The push for digital integration for business in the Global South must take into consideration the [digital and data divide](#), i.e., limited access to digital technologies, and poor access to high-quality data. A digital-first or digital-only economic policy tends to deepen inequality within and among nations. Bridging these gaps requires a [global regulatory mechanism](#) that can meet the domestic needs of developing countries with focus on the promotion of local platforms, investment in physical infrastructure, financing a digital industrialization strategy, particular investment in digital public infrastructure, and so on. In particular, in the absence of a global data governance mechanism which addresses how benefits of data are to be redistributed and binding regulations on digital transnational corporations, e-business will continue to disadvantage developing countries, especially small businesses. Platform value chains continue to be

skewed against women-owned businesses, who face concerns with sourcing, procurement, logistics, and transportation due to their inability to engage with the value chains effectively. This must be remedied through [digital integration](#) of these businesses.

The international digital trade agenda also does very little to uplift enterprises in the Global South. On the contrary, with the majority of the negotiating power concentrated in the hands of the US, China, and the EU, the developing world is often reduced to mere exporters of raw data. The Global South must also, then, [pay to access services](#) that are built using their data. The [refusal to tax electronic transmissions](#) is one instance in the attempt to minimize costs for the Global North, while affecting tax revenues for the South. There are also significant concerns around market dynamics, with digital TNCs affecting competition in various countries, impact to workers because of platform labor practices, Big Tech owning all layers of the data value chain through vertical integration, and lack of access to data for public and social value creation – all of which are affected because of ineffective platform regulation.

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-learning

[Considerable evidence](#) exists on how technology in education (EdTech) has distorted content, pedagogy, and assessment processes; harmed learner environments and teacher–student relationships by promoting the passive consumption of content; and deskilled teachers and diluted teacher and learner agency. EdTech has curbed the autonomous functioning of institutions and undercut the ability of education systems to influence larger progressive societal aims.

There is a need to promote public ownership and control over EdTech for teachers and educators to exercise their agency and autonomy for a meaningful pedagogic design of EdTech. Free and open digital tech movements have advocated enabling such public ownership of EdTech, which is an indispensable part of the appropriation of tech in education.

This need has become even more urgent and critical with the advent of black box algorithms, which further dilute teacher agency, atomize teaching-learning processes, and compromise the privacy, safety, and security of both teachers and students through [data harvesting](#).

The Covid-19 pandemic boosted digital technologies in all sectors and its impact was also seen in education; EdTech proliferation is widespread and acceptable today, which has increased the potential for harm. Proprietary EdTech needs to be regulated and the public production, distribution, and appropriation of EdTech needs to be encouraged to enable public provisioning of education. An example of a [public EdTech ecosystem](#) is in the Indian state of Kerala, which made its education system significantly more resilient during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to others in the country.

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-health

The benefits of e-health include enhanced access to healthcare services through telemedicine and mobile health (mHealth) platforms; improved efficiency and streamlined operations through ICT applications such as electronic health record (EHR) or personal health record (PHR) systems; patient-centric treatment and solutions; expedited delivery of services; and easier access to health resources and information for patients and caregivers; among others.

However, digitalization of healthcare brings with it significant concerns, particularly related to privacy and security of sensitive patient data. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, governments worldwide introduced various solutions to facilitate vaccine access. Examples include [India's Aarogya Setu](#), which proved highly effective in contact tracing and monitoring vaccine distribution. Despite its success, concerns arose around issues such as [security and privacy violations](#), [data breaches](#), and denial of vaccines to individuals without an Aadhaar number, a unique 12-digit identifier for residents of India.

Ethical considerations in implementing digital initiatives play a crucial role in ensuring their effectiveness. The trajectory of current digitalization of healthcare is being driven by the integration of for-profit technology firms into healthcare institutions and practices. This integration is marked by the presence of [inherent biases](#) in favor of the private firms and discriminatory design in these technological developments. Safeguarding EHR/PHR from misuse, and [inappropriate data mergers or sales](#), especially with Big Tech, and [preventing data breaches](#) pose considerable challenges for governments, policymakers, and healthcare professionals. Absence of universal health data governance principles or ineffective implementation of privacy law in the healthcare sector are major reasons behind these challenges. Additionally, there are concerns around Big Tech's capture of public health data and the resultant privatization of this important resource. Integration of Big Tech with public health data leads to privatization of this data and loss of accountability for larger public goals and social value. It also allows Big Tech to gain insight into multiple sectors and solidify their market concentration in the entire economy because of vast amounts of data collected. Without adequate regulation, this poses significant challenges to e-health measures.

It is imperative to address the significant challenges to core values of privacy and informed consent, ethical considerations of equity, and technical concerns of interoperability, accessibility, limited digital public infrastructure for analytics and processing. The risks of displacing human and social considerations in technologization and biomedicalization through datafication also bring new challenges. With the advancement of AI in all sectors, including health, there are [additional challenges](#) of inaccurate diagnoses

because of biased algorithms, privacy risks with sensitive personal health data being monitored by these algorithms, inaccurate diagnosis through overreliance on AI systems, and ethical concerns around transparency and accountability of these algorithms in healthcare.

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-employment

No specific input.

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-environment

No specific input.

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-agriculture

Agriculture is undergoing substantial changes as a result of the proliferation of digital devices and their heightened interconnectedness, leading to extensive transformations influencing individuals, societies, and the environment. Emerging technologies such as AI, analytics, connected sensors, and others have the potential to enhance agricultural productivity, optimize water and resource utilization, and foster sustainability and resilience in both crop farming and animal husbandry.

A significant challenge in the adoption of ICT in e-agriculture is the limited digital literacy among farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers. In the contexts of developing countries, [rural populations encounter challenges](#) such as poor connectivity leading to inadequate access to agricultural information, digital public goods and infrastructure, and limited exposure to innovative and new technology. This results in loss of income opportunities, migration in search for better or decent livelihoods, debt, and poor subsistence.

Although many farmers have begun to refer to [data and analytics](#) for [essential variables](#) like soil, crops, livestock, and weather, lack of proven technologies, localized content, capacity, cost, infrastructure and connectivity inadequacies, and the digital device divide continue to pose hurdles.

Hence, it is imperative that ICTs, such as mobile technologies, are [customized to specific contexts](#) and developed in collaboration with end-users and beneficiaries to ensure their adequacy, relevance, and accessibility.

Worryingly, the contemporary landscape of agribusiness is witnessing a profound transformation with the rise of corporate takeovers, which not only entail consolidation of market power but also raise concerns regarding [data extractivism](#) – the extraction of information related to crop yields, weather patterns, soil

conditions, farmer behavior, and the imposition of predictive technologies, derived from the same insights, on farmers.

Several non-profit and civil society organizations have spoken out against techno-fixes such as [geoengineering](#), [crop/seed patenting](#), [agro-industrialization](#), and the resultant threats to resource systems (air, water, soil, etc.), biodiversity, and food security, particularly in developing countries.

C7. ICT applications: Benefits in all aspects of life - E-science

No specific input.

C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content

See C3.

C9. Media

See C3.

C10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society

While the rapid advancement of digital technologies in today's information society has the potential to connect people and share information, it also poses significant risks to the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature. The reckless deployment of digital technologies has been linked to the perpetuation of hate, violence, entrenchment of discrimination and historical prejudices, undermining of labor rights, and threats to peace and security. The [environmental impact](#) of digital technologies is also substantial, contributing to ecological harm through [greenhouse gas emissions](#), overuse of water resources, contamination of natural environments, and the generation of electronic waste. We urgently need to re-center the idea of a just digital transition for people and planet that leaves no one behind. A binding framework of human rights-based norms is needed for the AI paradigm, developed through appropriate consultative processes and moving beyond self-regulation and voluntary ethical codes for industry.

C11. International and regional cooperation

An equitable digital future needs a fundamental restructuring in the allocative, distributive, and redistributive mechanisms governing data and AI as drivers of the economy. This is predicated on a host of international political economy considerations that mark our human-digital predicament:

- Fairness and equity in digital trade and value chains with respect for domestic digital policy space of developing countries,

- reform to market regulation that can break up Big Tech – so that the rise of monopolistic behemoths can be tackled head-on,
- reform to intellectual property in the data economy to enable public interest data and innovation to flourish,
- development finance to build domestic digital infrastructure,
- corporate accountability for violations of digital human rights, harms, and exclusions in digital value chains, and
- a new set of global principles for data governance grounded in human rights and equity, as well as the right of all peoples to data self-determination.

9. What are the key emerging issues and trends in the field of ICTs for development that should be taken into consideration for the WSIS+20 review?

Democracy and development are two sides of the same coin. This means that the data and AI revolution needs to have a strong democratic ethos for an equitable, inclusive, and people-centered information society to materialize.

Some key issues that need to be considered for the review, from this starting point, and addressed through an ‘One UN Programme on Digitalisation with the Following Tracks’, have been recommended by the UN Secretary-General’s 10-Member-Group of High-level Representatives of Scientific Community, Private Sector and Civil Society in support of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism in its [May 2023 Report](#).

The suggestions of the report (p. 39) – particularly robust program tracks for resurrecting the ICTD agenda through the One UN Programme on Digitalisation – have been cited below.

1. Track on democratic global digital cooperation and principles development: While generative AI has caught everyone’s imagination, we need to explore how digital intelligence and data models stand the test of abiding social and institutional ethics. Today, the AI paradigm reinforces geo-political and geoeconomic fault lines. Its trajectory is based on an undermining of next-generation jobs in the Global South. An invisible army of youth from developing countries perform painstaking, low-paid work for AI value chains (in annotation, content moderation, testing, click farms, etc.). It is unclear how such AI can be truly regenerative for the Global South without efforts to preserve and strengthen local knowledge and local economic capacity/local pockets of entrepreneurship and innovation. We need an ethical and transformative framework for generative AI that is not extractive, exploitative, centralized, or corporatized, but embodying values of a humane and transformative paradigm based on democratic and distributive

integrity. This track on principles and democratic cooperation can undertake research for policy development with contributions from a range of actors across the world and come up with flagship reports.

2. Track on innovation and development: A dedicated, multilateral hub – linked to regional and national nodes and mechanisms – where frontier tech and sustainability science researchers and innovators from developing and developed countries can come together on equal footing to jointly work out and test solutions for the global challenges the world faces.

3. Track on technical and policy capabilities for future-ready innovation ecosystems: For any program to produce robust public digital innovation ecosystems in the Global South, policy support is essential. This track can work closely with UNCTAD on issues such as digitalization and intellectual property. For instance, UNCTAD has recommended free online access to information on patent-free technologies that are readily available for firms in developing countries. Training policymakers on an ongoing basis is crucial.

4. Track integrated with the technology bank for LDCs: There are lessons to be learned from the shortcomings of the Technology Access Programme of the Technology Bank for LDCs. Without a dedicated line of financing and support to policymakers in developing countries, national roadmaps for local AI infrastructural development cannot take off. To overturn the status quo in the AI political economy that condemns much of the population of the Global South to remain 'AI laggards', public financing mechanisms are vital. The financing track for innovation and frontier tech and science can give impetus to the technology bank.

10. Looking ahead to WSIS+20 and beyond, what is your vision for the future of the WSIS process and its role in shaping the global digital agenda?

Our digital futures demand new institutional methodologies for coordinated multilateral norm-setting that are participatory. From a Digital Development Tax that is based on compulsory contributions from Big Tech firms to finance public digital infrastructure in developing countries (proposed by the UNSG), to binding rules for tech corporations based on digital human rights norms that puts an end to the extractive impulse of Big Tech, Big Pharma and Big Agri, and checks and balances for state power commensurate with digital times, we need a new global digital governance agenda that responds to myriad challenges.

In particular, the WSIS+20 process must revisit the action lines in consideration of three main underlying factors, as pointed to by the Secretary-General in his report to the CSTD in 2023:

- a. The continued digital divide, not just in access to connectivity but also meaningful use, stemming from the lack of access to opportunities for digital literacy and enskillment for the world's most vulnerable populations.
- b. The relationship between digital development and other aspects of the global society in policymaking, particularly in development policy and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- c. The pace of change of technology, particularly the advent of new frontier data, AI technologies, and associated challenges for concerted and coordinated governance across global-to-local spaces to enable step change that is truly transformative for the most marginalized.

