

Input at the Virtual Consultation on Rev. 3 of the Global Digital Compact

IT for Change

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IT for Change and the Global Digital Justice Forum¹

I am Merrin and I represent IT for Change and the Global Digital Justice Forum. We note that Rev 3 does carry an ambitious vision of transformative global digital cooperation. However, the spirit of its Preamble, we believe, cannot be realized without fixing the following gaps:

First. Silence on development financing stimulus: Rev 3.0 is a missed opportunity in terms of setting specific targets for The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development in 2025 on financing data and AI infrastructure, including, compute capacity for developing countries. This gap must be bridged and the GDC must make concrete public financing commitments for digital industrialization in developing countries.

Second. Short changing sustainable digital transition: The ‘environmental sustainability’ principle outlined in Para 8 does not acknowledge the common but differentiated responsibilities of Member States for a sustainable digital transition.

Third. A status-quoist vision of data governance: By pushing for the interoperability of data governance approaches, Rev 3.0 ignores the historical specificity and diversity of approaches that member states have pursued in order to “maximize the benefits of data use while protecting privacy and securing data”. Technical interoperability is not the same as a political data governance regime. The push for interoperable data governance is nothing more than a push for extractive cross-border data flows.

Fourth. Sidestepping the WSIS mandate: Rev 3 does not do enough to address the unfinished agenda of the WSIS for public policy responsibilities of governments in the international digital order. Without clarity on how outcomes from the working group on data governance and the scientific panel on AI will produce a binding multilateral policy consensus, a global constitutionalism on data and AI will continue to evade us. As a civil society network from the South, we wish to underline that we do not need more soft law on the digital. We need urgent action to check the excesses of Big Tech. We also wish to add that all processes for global digital governance must be rooted in a democratic, multistakeholder approach that includes the most marginalized voices.

Fifth. Absence of a robust human rights scaffolding: While the Principles section of the Compact is explicitly anchored in human rights law, the Compact does not seem to walk the talk in its core substance; for instance, in relation to addressing Internet access (and shut downs), use of surveillance tech, and restrictions on encryption.

¹ The Global Digital Justice Forum is a group of civil society organizations and networks working on digital rights and justice. IT for Change acts as the secretariat of the forum.