

Response to the WSIS+20 Review Elements Paper

Introduction

The RIPE NCC, as a Regional Internet Registry and part of the global technical community, welcomes the opportunity to engage in this stakeholder consultation and provide input to the Elements Paper that will inform the Zero Draft of the WSIS+20 outcome document.

While we appreciate that the Elements Paper recognises the progress made so far and recognises the WSIS vision of a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented society, we recall that the WSIS mandate has been comprehensively reviewed in 2015 and therefore believe that the past and new agreements reached should also be respected. Therefore, we note that the Internet governance area in the Elements Paper should align with the language adopted also in the Global Digital Compact and reaffirm that Internet governance must continue to be global and multistakeholder in nature.

1. What are the most important achievements arising from WSIS that should be highlighted in the Zero Draft?

1. Scaled-Up Connectivity

The Zero Draft should highlight the progress made in connecting the unconnected as genuine, significant, and measurable efforts have been undertaken by a wide range of stakeholders, including the private sector, technical community, governments, civil society, and others. Platforms such as the WSIS Forum, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), and broader UN-led initiatives have all contributed to increased global Internet connectivity and tangible improvements in access and infrastructure. However, for remaining challenges, see Q2.

Another key achievement has been the sustained coordination and contribution of the technical community organisations such as the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) that develops Internet protocols and standards, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), and the Regional Internet Registries (RIRs), which coordinate technical functions of the global Internet and inclusive, bottom-up policy development. This work plays a vital role in ensuring that the Internet remains open, global, interoperable, and secure and has laid the foundation for a resilient and scalable digital environment. The understanding that no single stakeholder can bridge the digital divide alone has solidified across the community, reinforcing the value of collaborative, inclusive approaches to digital development.

The RIPE NCC has contributed to the expansion of digital infrastructure in Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Central Asia through the distribution of Internet number resources and ongoing support for infrastructure development.

2. Advancement of Norms and Rights in the Digital Age

One of the most meaningful achievements of the WSIS process has been the deepening global understanding of the Internet ecosystem and the development of shared norms. Notably, the recognition that rights enjoyed offline must also be protected online has become a guiding



principle in international policy discussions. The growing awareness that the digital sphere reflects many of the same societal challenges faced offline, such as inequality, discrimination, and exclusion, has led to stronger commitments to human rights-based approaches in digital governance.

3. Strengthening Multistakeholder Internet Governance

The creation of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) through the WSIS process stands as one of its most enduring institutional achievements. Since its inception, the IGF has evolved into a dynamic, inclusive platform that extends far beyond its annual event. Its strength lies in the sustained, year-round intersessional engagement of stakeholder groups including governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, and international organisations through collaborative leadership and continuous dialogue.

A particularly notable development has been the organic growth of National, Regional, Sub-Regional, and Youth IGF Initiatives (NRIs), which have expanded much like the Internet itself through decentralised, community-driven networks of stakeholders that respond to local needs. Today, with 177 NRIs present in 110 countries, these initiatives bring global Internet governance principles closer to national and regional contexts. They should be formally recognised and better leveraged as vital components of the broader Internet governance ecosystem, ensuring that diverse perspectives continue to inform global processes from the ground up.

1. Scaled-Up Global Connectivity

WSIS has catalysed genuine, collaborative progress in extending Internet connectivity and access worldwide, supported by multistakeholder efforts and the sustained technical coordination that helped build resilient, open, interoperable, and secure global digital infrastructure. The RIPE NCC has contributed to the expansion of digital infrastructure in Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Central Asia through the distribution of Internet number resources and ongoing support for infrastructure development.

2. Advancing Digital Norms and Rights

The WSIS process has promoted global recognition that human rights must be protected the same online as offline, encouraging rights-based approaches to digital policy and greater awareness of shared societal challenges in the digital space.

3. Strengthening Multistakeholder Internet Governance

WSIS led to the creation and evolution of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), out of which organically grew its global network of 177 National, Regional, Sub-Regional, and Youth Initiatives (NRIs). These initiatives have embedded inclusive governance in local contexts and reinforced multistakeholder cooperation worldwide. Both WSIS and the GDC recognised the global and multistakeholder nature of Internet governance. Expanding and strengthening this model is essential to realising the WSIS vision in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

2. What are the most important challenges to the achievement of WSIS outcomes to date and in the future that need to be addressed in the Zero Draft?

1. Closing the Digital Divide Through Scaled-Up Network Connectivity and Capacity Building

The Zero Draft should acknowledge that, despite meaningful progress, closing the digital divide remains a persistent and pressing challenge. Significant gaps in connectivity, particularly in underserved and remote regions, continue to limit inclusive access to the Internet and its benefits. Addressing this requires sustained investment in network connectivity, capacity building, adequate training, infrastructure development, and knowledge-sharing. These efforts are essential not only for bridging current access divides, but also for equipping societies to engage with emerging technologies in a meaningful and sustainable way.

At the outset of WSIS, a common misconception often was that private sector or public-private partnerships alone could close the digital divide. While such collaboration is necessary, it is not sufficient. Achieving lasting impact requires the active participation of an even broader set of stakeholders that includes the technical community, civil society, and local communities, each bringing unique capabilities and perspectives.

2. Global South Participation and the Need for Clear Follow-Up and Implementation Mechanisms

The Internet remains a powerful enabler of innovation, empowerment, and growth, but its continued openness, interoperability, resilience, and security depend on coordinated and inclusive action. Current financial mechanisms seem to lack the scale and structure to meet the growing needs, and many governments have been slow to integrate WSIS Action Lines into their digital transformation strategies.

Among many factors, this is often due to the absence of clear targets, coordination, and follow-up procedures. Addressing these implementation gaps must be a top priority, underpinned by structured accountability, meaningful stakeholder engagement, and long-term planning. Ensuring sustained participation from developing countries in shaping digital policies remains a key challenge in global digital cooperation.

Without adequate inclusion, there is a risk that global outcomes will not reflect the diverse realities and needs of all regions. To address these gaps, implementation of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) should be embedded within an inclusive, multistakeholder framework established by the WSIS process.

This would help ensure the development of clear, coordinated, and accountable follow-up mechanisms, supported by measurable targets, non-duplicative venues, and transparent reporting. A multistakeholder approach is essential not only for legitimacy, but for ensuring that digital cooperation efforts deliver equitable, global benefits.



3. Safeguarding the Interoperability, Availability and Integrity of the Global Internet

As the backbone of digital transformation, the Internet must remain a stable and unified platform. Preserving its core architectural elements is essential to achieving the WSIS Action Lines and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. Multistakeholder collaboration is particularly important in the area of cybersecurity (for example, the RIPE NCC's cooperation with stakeholders on IPv6 deployment and adoption of Resource Public Key Infrastructure (RPKI) for routing security in its service region). These efforts have been further reinforced by capacity-building initiatives, including training programmes aimed at strengthening the security and resilience of the Internet.

1. Closing the Digital Divide and Capacity Building

Despite progress, large gaps in network connectivity and digital skills, especially in underserved and remote areas as well as among women and girls, remain a barrier to the equitable access and meaningful, affordable connectivity necessary for both social and economic development. This must be addressed through inclusive capacity-building and stakeholder-driven solutions.

2. Lack of Clear Implementation and Inclusive Participation Mechanisms

The absence of clear targets, follow-up procedures, and consistent stakeholder engagement, particularly from the Global South, continues to hinder progress, highlighting the need for GDC implementation within a transparent, multistakeholder WSIS framework.

3. Risks to the Stability and Integrity of the Global Internet

Preserving the open, global, interoperable, and secure architecture of the Internet and its core functions is critical for achieving WSIS and SDG goals and requires coordinated efforts to safeguard its technical foundation and resist fragmentation.

3. What are the most important priorities for action to achieve the WSIS vision of a 'people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society' in the future, taking into account emerging trends?

1. Refocus global attention on closing the digital divide while preparing for tomorrow's emerging technologies:

The Internet must evolve to support not just current users but also future innovation in AI, quantum computing, and robotics. Bridging digital divides today ensures readiness for tomorrow. Expanding connectivity, and providing an enabling environment while safeguarding the interoperability, availability, and integrity of the global Internet with the involvement of stakeholders, are the key priorities in achieving the WSIS vision.

2. Reaffirm the WSIS Action Lines and strengthen their alignment with SDGs:

Improved coherence across the WSIS framework and related digital cooperation workflows within the UN-specialised agencies is needed. To achieve this, it is essential to reinforce the alignment of WSIS technology-neutral Action Lines with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Internet Governance Forum (IGF), through its multistakeholder intersessional work, Best Practice Forums, Policy Networks, and Dynamic Coalitions, generates valuable outputs

that reflect bottom-up input from diverse regions and sectors. These outputs should be more systematically integrated into regional and global policy processes and mainstreamed into the workflows of relevant UN bodies and specialised agencies. This would help ensure that the WSIS framework remains an effective and coordinated vehicle for delivering people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented outcomes, in line with the 2030 Agenda and beyond.

3. A renewed permanent IGF mandate, with stable UN funding, alongside reinforced WSIS mechanisms will establish a stable, inclusive platform for continued dialogue. As recognised in the Global Digital Compact, the IGF should remain “the premier platform for Internet governance discussion”, with shared responsibility and alignment with the SDGs and broader digital cooperation frameworks. In particular, IGF multistakeholder National Regional, Sub-Regional, and Youth Initiatives (NRIs) should be formally recognised and strategically leveraged to collect information, gather insights, inform policy, and strengthen local-to-global linkages.

4. Recognise the Internet’s layered nature in digital governance:

Effective digital governance must respect the boundaries between the Internet’s technical functions and the regulation of the application and content layers above it. While these layers are interdependent, they serve different purposes and require distinct approaches. Aligning policy interventions with the appropriate layer helps avoid unintended consequences and supports the interoperability and resilience that make the Internet a global resource.

5. Strengthen the technical community’s role and collaboration with governments:

Deepening collaboration between technical experts and policymakers will foster evidence-based governance and informed decision-making, ensuring digital policies are technically sound and future-proof. This can be achieved by improving information-sharing and direct collaboration, particularly between the technical community, government, and public sector entities.

1. Refocus Global Attention on Closing the Digital Divide while Preparing for Tomorrow's Emerging Technologies

The Internet must evolve to support not only current users but also future innovations in areas such as AI, quantum computing, and robotics. Bridging digital divides today is essential to ensuring global readiness for these emerging technologies. Expanding connectivity, fostering an enabling policy and regulatory environment, and safeguarding the interoperability, availability, and integrity of the global Internet, with the involvement of stakeholders, are key priorities for realising the WSIS vision.

2. Reaffirm and Align WSIS Action Lines with the SDGs

Reinforcing the relevance of the WSIS technology-neutral Action Lines and aligning them more closely with the Sustainable Development Goals will ensure digital development efforts remain people-centred, inclusive, and outcome-driven.

3. Renew the IGF Mandate and Leverage NRIs for Inclusion

A strengthened, permanent mandate for the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), with stable UN funding, including the formal recognition and strategic use of National, Regional,



Sub-Regional, and Youth Initiatives (NRIs), will support inclusive governance and shared responsibility and will contribute to digital progress.

4. Respect the Internet's Layered Architecture in Digital Policy

Future digital governance must differentiate between the Internet's technical infrastructure and application/content layers, ensuring policies support interoperability and avoid disrupting the global, open nature of the Internet.

5. Strengthen the Technical Community's Role and Collaboration with Governments

Deepening ties between technical experts and policymakers will foster evidence-based governance and informed decision-making, ensuring digital policies are technically sound and future-proof. This can be achieved by improving information-sharing and direct collaboration, particularly between the technical community, government, and public sector entities.

4. What additional themes/issues, if any, should be included in the Elements Paper?

N/A

5. Do you wish to comment on particular themes/issues/paragraphs in the Elements Paper?

The current formulation of Internet governance in paragraph 59 in the Elements Paper does not fully reflect the breadth and diversity of actors involved in shaping the global Internet landscape. A more balanced and representative description could draw on established language from the WSIS+10 Outcome Document, language that has also been reaffirmed in the 2024 Global Digital Compact.

This framing acknowledges that *"Internet governance must continue to be global and multistakeholder in nature, with full involvement of Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organisations, technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders."*

6. What suggestions do you have to support the development of the WSIS framework (WSIS Action Lines, IGF, WSIS Forum, UNGIS, etc.)?

To support the continued development of the WSIS framework, and create effective governance mechanisms that can support future technological developments, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the Internet's technical architecture and the essential role of community-driven technical governance. This understanding will be instrumental to fostering the collective effort needed to address persistent digital divides and ensure progress towards achieving the SDGs. The technical community organisations contribute their expertise to the

WSIS technology-neutral framework especially, in the case of the RIPE NCC, in relation to WSIS Action Lines C1, C2, C4, and C5, C6, and C11.

The RIPE NCC supports a permanent IGF mandate with stable UN funding to enable effective functioning of the IGF MAG, the IGF Secretariat, NRIs, and intersessional activities. We also support strengthening the executive role of UNGIS, improving coordination among UN agencies, and strengthening the role of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) in follow-up and reporting.

7. Do you have any other comments?

The RIPE NCC appreciates the efforts of the WSIS+20 Review Co-Facilitators in engaging with stakeholders through open and constructive dialogue, including their participation at the IGF 2025 and the WSIS+20 High-Level Event. We support the convening of joint consultation sessions that would bring together governments and other stakeholders.

We also commend the UN Secretary-General for his steadfast commitment to including youth as a key stakeholder in policy discussions and for his continued leadership in advancing digital cooperation under Our Common Agenda. We encourage efforts to extend the existing IGF mandate as set out in paragraphs 72-78 of the Tunis Agenda and to recognise and strengthen the role of the global network of National, Regional, Sub-Regional, and Youth IGF Initiatives (NRIs) as part of this evolving digital cooperation architecture.