GNI, GPD, and SWIUM Country Partners Input to the WSIS+20 Review Elements Paper Consultation

In June 2025, the Global Network Initiative (GNI) and Global Partners Digital (GPD) published the compilation "The Road to WSIS+20: Key Country Perspectives in the Twenty-Year Review of the World Summit on the Information Society" as part of the *Shaping the WSIS+20 Review for a Unified Internet Multistakeholderism* project supported by the inaugural ICANN Grant Program.

The report offers valuable insights into the WSIS process and national-level priorities, bringing together research from Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ghana, India, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia. Partners include the Centre for Communications Governance at the National Law University, New Delhi, Data Privacy Brasil, Derechos Digitales, Digitally Right, Fundación Karisma, Media Foundation for West Africa, Paradigm Initiative, Research ICT Africa, and Collaboration for International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa. In addition, the report also includes research chapters on China, the European Union (EU), Indonesia, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), Russia, Saudi Arabia and Switzerland.

This submission to the WSIS+20 Review Elements Paper consultation is based on learnings and highlights from the research. The examples provided are directly from the research compendium.

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

The research undertaken by country partners highlights several examples of how WSIS has helped to catalyze digital development including:

- **Promotion of digital transformation and national development goals:** *Countries view WSIS as a catalyst for advancing digital transformation and national development.* Ghana considers WSIS central to its agenda, aligning closely with Action Lines C1 (The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development), C3 (Access to information and knowledge), and C7 (e-Government and ICT applications).

Initiatives like the e-Transform Ghana Project and the Digital Ghana Agenda reflect its commitment to leveraging ICT for economic growth and better public services.

- **Promotion of Digital Inclusion and Bridging the Digital Divide:** *Countries have invested heavily—often through public-private partnerships—to advance digital inclusion.* In 2023, Zambia invested nearly USD 60 million in infrastructure, partnering with Airtel and IHS Towers to launch 152 towers, expanding coverage to 91.6% and improving rural connectivity. Ghana has advanced its digital economy through initiatives like the Digital Financial Services Policy and the Ghana Innovation Hub. Bangladesh's long-running "Digital Bangladesh" strategy has expanded Internet access and digital literacy across key sectors. South Africa has focused on community-centred connectivity, combining supportive regulation with targeted funding for local networks.

- **Strengthening of E-Government and Digital Public Services:** *Countries are formalizing digital public services through national strategies*. For example, Zambia's Smart Zambia Institute leads e-government efforts, including a Digital Transformation Change Management Strategy (2023–2026). Similarly, India has prioritized digital public services through its broader push for Digital Public Infrastructure.

- **Presentation and positioning of digital agenda at the global level and regional level.** *Countries have used WSIS as a platform to advance their digital agendas on the global stage and at the regional level.* Ghana's WSIS+20 engagement reflects its ambition to become a regional ICT hub. In Bangladesh, following the 2024 political transition, there is renewed momentum for reform; although no formal WSIS+20 position has been announced, discussions on digital governance and multistakeholder engagement are re-emerging, with civil society, academia, and the private sector beginning to re-engage. Despite this progress, consultation processes have yet to reflect genuine multistakeholder participation, with some recent reforms excluding key stakeholder voices. Brazil has increasingly prioritized digital issues—such as connectivity, information integrity, AI, and digital public infrastructure—framing them within broader goals of reducing inequality and strengthening digital sovereignty. Its longstanding role in Internet governance and regional influence position Brazil as a key actor in the WSIS+20 process.

- **Part of larger efforts to increase participation in multilateral digital cooperation**: *WSIS has supported countries in deepening their engagement with multilateral digital cooperation.* Ghana's growing role in bodies like the ITU Council and Digital Cooperation Organization highlights its interest in shaping global digital norms. South Africa and other nations continue to back multistakeholder principles, emphasizing inclusive, balanced governance and equal participation. Renewed focus from WSIS+20 has spurred national consultations on issues like universal connectivity, AI, and data governance, alongside calls for stronger multilateral cooperation and reforms to support resource-limited countries.

- **Evolution and growth of the application of the WSIS principles of participation through the multistakeholder approach to Internet governance:** This is demonstrated in particular through the IGF and the IGF ecosystem, which sees active involvement by a number of countries, and includes national and regional IGFs, policy networks, youth IGFs, the parliamentary track, dynamic coalitions and best practice forums.

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?

The research carried out by country partners highlight a number of challenges to the achievement of WSIS that should be addressed in the Zero Draft:

- *Multistakeholder participation: While multistakeholder participation remains a foundational WSIS principle and is supported across countries, its implementation faces ongoing challenges—including power imbalances, limited funding, and centralized processes—that hinder inclusive participation, especially for stakeholders from the Global Majority*. Brazil supports both multistakeholder and multilateral approaches, but has raised concerns about the tight WSIS+20 timeline and internal coordination constraints. South Africa supports multistakeholder Internet governance and technical coordination. On global public policy however their view is that final decision-making authority should lie with States. Ghana's engagement is rooted in multistakeholder principles, yet consultations remain largely capital-based, limiting rural and grassroots participation. India has consistently supported multistakeholder governance but noted a

need for greater clarity around the review timeline and modalities for input. Bangladesh's initial multistakeholder approach has shifted toward a more centralized, state-led model amid rising digital repression and restrictive legal frameworks. Colombia, through its Ministry of ICT (MinTIC), continues to support multistakeholder Internet governance, participating actively in regional forums such as the LACIGF.

- ***Internet Governance Forum:*** *Countries continue to support and participate in the IGF as a key space for inclusive, multistakeholder dialogue. Yet, challenges such as funding as well as support for national and regional IGF's was highlighted.* Brazil has reaffirmed the IGF as a national priority while calling for a clearer purpose and stronger mandate. Chile co-hosted the 2024 Latin American and Caribbean IGF and participated in NETMundial+10, while remaining active in national-level IGF processes. Colombia's MinTIC is part of the LACIGF Multistakeholder Committee, and Ghana engages through platforms like ICANN, AfIGF, and national IGF events, underscoring a broader commitment to participatory Internet governance.

- **WSIS and the Global Digital Compact**: *Countries broadly support both the WSIS and the GDC, emphasizing the importance of coordination between the two to avoid duplication and fragmentation.* Brazil highlighted that the relationship between WSIS and the GDC remains unclear and expressed concern that prioritizing the GDC—particularly by Global North actors—could reduce WSIS to a bureaucratic exercise and deepen global digital inequalities. Chile, speaking through the G77+China during GDC negotiations, stressed that WSIS+20 outcomes should guide international cooperation, given WSIS's development-focused principles. In Bangladesh, national consultations involving Aspire to Innovate (a2i), Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum (BIGF), and Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) contributed to a GDC submission that called for alignment with WSIS Action Lines (C1–C11), greater inclusivity, and the strengthening of existing forums such as WSIS and the IGF. However, limited civil society involvement has raised concerns about representation. Ghana similarly emphasized that WSIS should remain central to global digital discussions due to its long-standing institutional memory, concrete action lines, and proven role in supporting digital development.

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?

- **Addressing digital repression:** *National examples show how digital repression—such as surveillance and Internet shutdowns—undermines the WSIS vision of an inclusive, people-centred Information Society.* Bangladesh has faced government-sanctioned Internet shutdowns nearly every year over the past decade. The arrest of numerous individuals and journalists has also been made possible using repressive laws to suppress dissenting views. Zambia has also experienced shutdowns, raising concerns about access and openness. By endorsing multistakeholder Internet governance and supporting the IGF mandate extension, Zambia signals a commitment to overcoming repression and promoting more equitable connectivity.

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** *AI is becoming central to digital governance, but global gaps in regulation, bias, state/private misuse, and lack of transparency risk worsening existing inequalities. Key priorities include domestic innovation, region-specific models, infrastructure support, and closing resource gaps. AI governance should also take justice into consideration environmental justice, as currently labour and material resources are sourced from developing countries with human and environmental injustices*. Chile emphasized the need for ethical frameworks, data privacy, and capacity building to responsibly develop models like Latam-GPT. Colombia highlighted the difficulty of scaling ethical AI and ensuring inclusive, multistakeholder dialogue. In India, AI is a development priority, with the IndiaAI Mission advancing innovation for social good and recent efforts focusing on open AI, open data, and Indic language models.

- **Meaningful Connectivity**: *While many countries prioritize meaningful connectivity and closing the material access gap, a persistent urban-rural divide limits equitable Internet use. Infrastructure investments have boosted coverage, but barriers like device costs and low digital literacy hinder meaningful access.* In South Africa, gaps in device access and data affordability remain stark between urban and rural areas, despite the country being a regional leader in connectivity. Zambia faces similar issues—despite over 91% network coverage, Internet use is still low in rural communities. These challenges underscore the

need for integrated and inclusive access strategies that address more than just infrastructure and enable "meaningful connectivity" that take access to infrastructure and devices, affordability, skills and useful content and services into account.

- **Inclusion:** *Marginalized groups—such as rural communities, women, and minorities—remain excluded from digital development due to a lack of tailored, community-sensitive approaches. National initiatives often miss grassroots needs, leading to underrepresentation and limited benefits.* South Africa has responded to persistent disparities in access, affordability, and digital skills with community-centred initiatives and funding for local networks. Zambia has similarly focused on expanding Internet access and closing coverage gaps in underserved areas, reflecting growing awareness of the need for equitable connectivity.

- **Gender equality:** *National-level efforts reflect a broader recognition across regions that gender equality must be integral to both digital policy and international engagement.* Several contexts have indicated gender equality as a priority, pursuing national-level initiatives such as the "We the Women" project in Chile and integrating gender into national positions. Ghana has advocated for responsible state behavior in cyberspace, which includes protections for women and vulnerable populations. India, too, has prioritized inclusive development and digital access, focusing on reducing gender disparities online and promoting multilingual approaches to human rights protections in cyberspace. However, challenges remain in bridging implementation gaps, especially in providing redress for digital harms and addressing the gender digital divide.

- **Sustainable Development Goals:** *The SDGs remain a key priority for many countries, guiding the integration of digital policy with broader development objectives.* Chile, for example, emphasized the importance of aligning technological progress with the WSIS commitments of 2003 and 2005, highlighting the SDG agenda as central to its national vision. Ranked 32nd on the Sustainable Development Index—the highest among Latin American countries—Chile sees sustainable development as integral to its digital strategy. Similarly, Colombia's National Digital Strategy (2023–2026) focuses on building an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable digital society, supported by policies that protect individual rights in the digital environment.

- **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPIs):** *While across countries, DPI has become central to digital transformation and development, concerns persist around governance, regulatory lag, and data privacy.* At the 2024 WSIS+20 Forum, India highlighted key DPI initiatives—Aadhaar, UPI, DIKSHA, Co-WIN, and eSanjeevani—alongside its low data costs and high fintech adoption. India emphasized inclusive, affordable technologies as essential to bridging the sustainability gap and advancing digital development. Brazil also supports the WSIS for its development focus and has prioritized emerging issues like AI and DPIs through the GDC.

- **Digital (data) Sovereignty:** *Data sovereignty is a national priority for many countries, addressing control, privacy, and ethical use of data.* Ghana supports preserving WSIS Action Lines but urges their update to include emerging issues like AI, data sovereignty, digital trade, and green ICTs. Brazil upholds the multistakeholder model and prioritizes development alongside strong data protection, enshrined in its Federal Constitution, and plans to join Convention 108+ in 2025.

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

Human Rights: *International human rights frameworks including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and other human rights treaties, should guide and be embedded across the WSIS Framework, including the WSIS Action Lines, IGF, WSIS Forum, and UNGIS.* Countries, like Brazil, Chile, and Zambia, have supported a human rights approach to Internet governance in different ways. However, gaps also remain. For example, at the national level, while WSIS themes like inclusion and development equity are mentioned in national strategy documents, in contexts like Bangladesh, these can lack a rights-based framing. Examples can be drawn upon from countries like Brazil, who has a strong track record of working with a human rights-based approach to Internet governance issues, as evidenced by the Marco Civil da Internet (Law No. 12,965 of 2014), which established Brazilians' rights to

privacy, freedom of expression online, and access to the Internet. Zambia is another important example of a country implementing human rights into key processes, as co-facilitator of the GDC, the country played a key role in shaping a process that included strong human rights language.

Equitable Participation: *Equitable access and participation should be enabled in and through the WSIS Framework.* In participation and messaging around WSIS+20 and GDC, countries have consistently noted the importance of having an equal seat at the table. South Africa has advocated for equitable digital governance that balances government leadership with inclusive participation and equal participation for all nations. While supporting the IGF and WSIS Forum, it has called for stronger multilateral cooperation and reforms to multistakeholder processes to better support resource-limited countries. India has reaffirmed support for multistakeholderism, but highlighted the lack of progress on enhanced cooperation. Zambia has pursued capacity-building initiatives and fostering of partnerships that amplify the voices of the underrepresented regions in global digital governance discussions. Bangladesh has pursued South–South cooperation, hosting a BIMSTEC regional consultation on the GDC to promote a unified voice among developing countries.

Bridge national, regional, and international efforts: *A body of work on the WSIS+20 review process has been carried out at the regional and national levels. To bridge the gap between efforts at the national, regional, and international levels, the Zero Draft and the WSIS framework should recognize and build on these efforts*. South Africa has traditionally played a key role in the original WSIS process, chairing committees that shaped the Geneva Declaration and Tunis Agenda. In Colombia, the ITU page dedicated to the stocktaking of activities for WSIS implementation, over one hundred Colombian projects are registered. Ghana joined other countries at the 2025 WSIS+20 Africa Regional Review Meeting convened in Cotonou, Benin and Ghanian stakeholders contributed to a Declaration which reaffirmed States commitment to implementing the WSIS Action Lines and Targets. India hosted the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in 2008 and has continued to participate in subsequent reviews, advocating for affordable access, development oriented policies, and more inclusive management of critical Internet resources.

Meaningful stakeholder engagement: Multistakeholder processes should be at the core of implementing the WSIS Framework. These should be driven at the international, regional, and national levels. That said, stakeholder engagement can be a challenge at the national level due to resourcing and capacity constraints. The WSIS Framework should account for this and provide support for national and regional level stakeholder engagement that is coherent with international efforts.

8. Who is submitting this input?

Global Network Initiative, Global Partners Digital, and the country partners in the project "*Shaping the WSIS+20 Review for a Unified Internet Multistakeholderism.*"