
ICANN85 Mumbai | CF – GNSO: NCSG Membership Work Session (2 of 2)
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ANDREA GLANDON

Hello, and welcome to the NCSG Membership Work session. Please note that this session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior, the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy, and the ICANN Community Participant Code of Conduct concerning statements of interest. Please observe the following guidelines to participate in this session. I will also post them in the chat shortly for your reference. Only questions posted in the Zoom chat identified as a question will be read aloud during this session as time permits and when directed by the chair of this session. If you wish to speak, please raise your hand in Zoom or otherwise as directed. When speaking, please state your name for the record and speak clearly at a moderate pace. I will now hand the floor over to NCSG Chair, Rafik Dammak. You may begin.

RAFIK DAMMAK

Thanks, Andrea, and thanks to everyone for making it to the last session of the day. Thanks also to those who are joining us remotely. Today's session is in partnership with our friends and colleagues from Global Partners Digital and the Global Network Initiative. This is a continuation of several sessions we had previously. We had one in Dublin and also a webinar regarding the WSIS Plus 20 review. It is concluded now, but the most important

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part is to see the outcome and look at next steps, including the impact on civil society, the technical community, and At-Large. We are looking here to know more in this ICANN meeting and to hear from those who are deeply and heavily involved in the process. With that, I will hand over to Shreya Tiwari from GNI. She will help us set the scene and go through this agenda. Yes, please, Shreya.

SHREYA TIWARI

Thank you, Rafik. Good evening, everyone, and thank you again for joining us today. This session is organized by the Noncommercial Stakeholder Group, and we thank you for collaborating with us at the GNI and with Global Partners Digital. This is part of a broader effort to reflect on the WSIS 20 process and what comes next. I am going to use the next five or seven minutes to set the tone and share more about our project before we move into the discussion.

To begin with the WSIS process, the World Summit on the Information Society, or WSIS, was convened in two phases in 2003 and 2005. This was a time when the internet was rapidly expanding, but there was no widely agreed global framework for digital cooperation or internet governance. WSIS was significant because it created one of the first multi-stakeholder frameworks within the UN system to address how digital technologies would shape society. Governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, and international organizations came together to develop this shared vision of a people-centric, inclusive, and development-oriented information society. The framework that

emerged from WSIS included a set of action lines, which effectively act as a roadmap for governments and stakeholders to implement digital development goals at the national level.

Fast-forward 20 years, and in 2025, the United Nations conducted the WSIS Plus 20 review, which was an important moment to assess whether the framework was still delivering on its original goals. This review did not happen in isolation. It unfolded in a much more complex digital governance ecosystem than the one that existed back in 2005. Over the past few years, we have seen the emergence of new global initiatives addressing digital governance, including the Global Digital Compact, which has introduced new mechanisms such as the Global Dialogue on AI Governance and a scientific panel on AI.

Against this backdrop, several key issues shaped the WSIS Plus 20 review. First, there was an effort to take stock of the progress made in implementing the WSIS outcomes, including how effectively countries have advanced the action lines at the national level. Second, the review addressed the renewal of the Internet Governance Forum, IGF, whose mandate was due to expire in 2025. Third, there were ongoing discussions about how to ensure meaningful participation for all stakeholders in the WSIS process, including civil society, the private sector, governments, and the technical community. The review also examined the relationship between the WSIS framework, the Global Digital Compact, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, raising broader

questions about how these different processes fit together within the evolving digital governance architecture.

One outcome of the review was that the IGF mandate was made permanent, which many stakeholders welcomed. At the same time, there were ongoing conversations about how the IGF might evolve, including proposals for new mechanisms such as a government track and broader discussions about how to strengthen its impact and participation. To support engagement in the WSIS Plus 20 review, the Global Network Initiative and Global Partners Digital partnered on a year-long project supported by the ICANN Grant Program titled Shaping the WSIS+20 Review for a Unified Internet Multistakeholderism. Through this project, we worked with ten civil society partners across multiple regions, conducting workshops and research in countries including Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, India, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia.

The project also included research chapters examining national positions in countries such as China, the EU, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Switzerland. This work was designed to better understand how national positions were formed during the review and how domestic political priorities, institutional structures, and policy debates shaped the way countries engaged in the negotiations. This builds on the compendium titled Looking Back: Tracking National Positions in the WSIS Review, synthesized by GPD and GNI. Importantly, while many of the countries we examined negotiated as part of the Group

of 77 plus China, their individual national perspectives did not always fully align with the bloc's collective position. Understanding those nuances is therefore important as we move into the implementation phase.

Some key highlights from the report include near-unanimous support for coherence between the GDC and WSIS. Countries had competing ideas about the extent to which WSIS is able to deliver on its digital developmental goals and whether it is adapted to emerging technologies. There were differing visions for internet governance, particularly around the balance between state authority and multi-stakeholder approaches and between more centralized and decentralized models of governance. Another key topic was whether the review process would deliver clearer or stronger commitments on human rights. The countries analyzed different rights, with some focusing on developmental rights and others on the right to access and digital divides. Some focused on a better digital future for specific groups, such as women and children. This subject was particularly urgent given the backdrop of geopolitical tension and the state use of technology.

Underpinning all of this were discussions about the future role and mandate of the IGF. That is where today's discussion comes in. The conclusion of the WSIS 20 review marks a transition from global negotiation to national and regional implementation. The question now is not only what the outcome documents say, but also how those commitments will be interpreted and implemented in practice. In the next 50 minutes, we want to reflect on how different

countries approach the WSIS 20 negotiations, what shaped those national positions, and what the outcomes may mean for implementation moving forward.

To do this, we are joined by Sukriti from the Center for Communication Governance at the National Law University, Delhi; David from the Technical Community Coalition for Multistakeholderism; and Patricia from the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa, who joins us through Zoom. We are also interested in discussing what role civil society, the technical community, and other stakeholders can play in supporting and scrutinizing implementation, whether that is through strengthening the IGF, engaging national institutions, or helping shape benchmarks and accountability mechanisms for the WSIS action lines. We will start with brief reflections from our speakers on how the WSIS process unfolded and what it means for implementation going forward. We will then move into a moderated conversation and open the floor for questions from the audience before closing with forward-looking reflections. We will begin with Sukriti. Thank you again, Sukriti, for joining us. CCG participated in the project mapping country-level positions. On reflection, how did your government engage in the WSIS+20 process? What are your reflections on the final text? From the perspective of CCG, what needs to be the priority for implementation?

SUKRITI GOVIL

Thank you, Shreya. That was a very good introduction. Regarding India's engagement with the WSIS process at the national level, the engagement was led by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, or MeitY. They engaged with various stakeholders domestically, including as part of events organized by civil society. They were very open to getting inputs on the WSIS process and engaged meaningfully with stakeholders. Broadly, India's engagement was defined by the needs of the Global South, highlighting existing gaps and inequalities between the North and the South. Mainly, it pointed to infrastructure gaps, unequal distribution of advanced capabilities, contextual specificities of the Global South, and a need for meaningful engagement through capacity building.

In line with its historical stance on the multi-stakeholder model, India expressed strong support for it in internet governance, except on matters of national security. It also called for collective efforts to ensure meaningful and inclusive participation of the Global South. However, in its explanation of the outcome document, it expressed that the process could have been handled in a more transparent and better-organized manner. It felt that inclusive participation from the Global South was not adequately addressed by the document. India also expressed regret that the document was not ambitious in its means of implementation and capacity building, despite its recognition of financing needs and technology transfer. Much of it was deferred to future assessments and was largely procedural.

Specifically, India expressed regret, in line with the Group of 77 block, that the document did not include an explicit reference to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. It considered this key to the development aspect of the document and a recognition of global structural disparities in capacities and resources. In terms of reflections on the final text, there are many positives. The outcome document upheld the original WSIS vision regarding the multi-stakeholder model and a people-centric vision. It included considerations for transparency and accountability, and the consultation process was very inclusive. It enabled a lot of participation, especially from the Global South, through virtual meetings conducted across different time zones. It recognizes capacity building and provides for coherence between the GDC and the permanence of the IGF, which is very significant.

Regarding specific reflections, I want to refer to the document's reference to DPIs and DPGs. While it acknowledges the need to promote inclusion, fairness, and respect for human rights, I think there is a key element of accountability there as well. There is a need to ensure accountability in the design, deployment, and governance of DPIs, where foreseeable harms and power asymmetries are accounted for, especially by taking into account affected communities from the Global South. Another aspect is that while there might be standard definitional understandings of these terms, they might differ in normative understandings and applications across different contexts. It might look different in India, Brazil, or Kenya. We need to agree on certain principles but

also ensure those principles are followed in operationalization and design, especially from a Global South perspective.

We need to ensure that in contexts such as India, where traditional institutions might be weaker and we look at tech to play a role in inclusion, the deployment of these technologies does not inadvertently weaken existing working mechanisms and lead to exclusion. A third aspect is cross-learning across different regions. Regarding environment and sustainable development, there is a need for recognition of the contradictions arising from technological expansion resulting from extractivist practices. Clearer commitments are needed. I think the document falls short in ensuring accountability and transparency from both states and private actors. The document's refusal to acknowledge the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is significant. It results in a dismissal of structural inequalities and economic, technological, and political asymmetries.

Lastly, regarding finance and capacity building, the document's treatment of it is a reflection of deeper continuing structural inequalities that have persisted since the beginning of WSIS in 2003 and 2005. Regarding priorities for implementation in India, there has been some legacy involvement within certain groups, but there is still a gap in how global conversations link back into national policymaking. This is still a relatively niche conversation, and national priorities will take precedence in how WSIS is implemented. Broadly, India will remain focused on the development of internet infrastructure and DPIs and will continue

to invest in AI. It is likely to remain focused on a pro-innovation approach and adopt regulations only where there is a need to address certain harms.

Regarding finance, with the document's emphasis on UNGIS and the ITU, it is important that implementation involves all stakeholders. The next step is to identify pathways to address persistent inequalities and rethinking what digital inclusion means. We need to produce data to identify where financing is most needed and the best ways to channel it. On the IGF, there is an emphasis on dialogue with governments, including Global South governments. There is a need to ensure it does not lapse into a hierarchy between government and civil society participation and that there is open dialogue on an equal footing. Many parallel conversations are happening, such as with the UN global dialogue on AI and the scientific panel. With the IGF being a legacy multi-stakeholder forum, it is important to ensure coherence and that outcomes from other forums are channeled back into the IGF without diluting the conversation. Lastly, implementation needs to be inclusive. We need to ensure that voices from the Global South are not just included but heard. Capacity building and technology transfer remain key priorities.

SHREYA TIWARI

Thank you, Sukriti. David, my next question is for you. From your point of view, what were some key priorities for the Technical Community Coalition for Multistakeholderism during WSIS+20? Do

you see these in the final outcome document? From the technical community's perspective, what should be prioritized for implementation?

DAVID

Thank you very much, Shreya. I appreciate the invitation. It is great to be here in Mumbai at our first ICANN gathering since WSIS Plus 20 concluded. I am looking forward to sharing my perspective on the outcome and highlighting things to watch as we move into implementation. It is clear that 2026 is going to be a big year. We have several ICANN meetings ahead, the first meeting of the IGF under its new permanent mandate, and the November plenipotentiary of the International Telecommunication Union. While the focus has been on WSIS Plus 20, 2026 opens the next chapter in internet governance.

I want to talk a little bit about TCCM, as we are a fresh face on the internet governance stage. We were founded almost exactly two years ago in response to the perceived threat that WSIS Plus 20 and the Global Digital Compact posed to the multi-stakeholder internet governance model. Since then, we have worked to strengthen multi-stakeholder internet governance. TCCM does not represent the entirety of the technical community, but we bring together a shared voice from organizations that operate the internet's core infrastructure and services. We have grown to 45 members, all united in support of a strengthened multi-stakeholder model. We

believe this collaboration, placing everyone on an equal footing, is essential if we are to fulfill the WSIS vision.

We know the multi-stakeholder approach does not magically sustain itself. If stakeholders do not show up, then someone else will shape the future of the internet without us. During WSIS+20, TCCM strongly supported the WSIS vision. There were real risks, including questions over the future of the IGF, recognition of the technical community, and the shift toward a more state-centric or multilateral approach to governance. TCCM members worked to develop shared positions and engaged throughout the process. We advocated for an outcome that recognized multi-stakeholder governance, the technical community's role, a permanent mandate for the IGF, and the retention of WSIS action lines. We were delighted that those outcomes were achieved. The outcome is a significant win for those who support an open, free, global, secure, resilient, and interoperable internet.

As we move into the implementation phase, I want to highlight areas to watch, starting with the IGF. It now has a permanent mandate, removing uncertainty about its future as the primary platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue. We have clear recognition of the broader IGF ecosystem, including national, regional, and youth IGFs. There is also a call to strengthen how the IGF functions with a stronger secretariat and better links across the ecosystem. Delivering on this vision will require sustained, diverse, long-term resourcing. The outcome document calls on the UN Secretary-General to submit a proposal on sustainable IGF funding by the end

of September. We will be watching this closely. We are also monitoring the ITU Plenipotentiary in November, as it has occasionally been a venue for proposals that risk undermining the multi-stakeholder model. We must ensure the gains from WSIS+20 are not rolled back. TCCM members will continue to play a constructive role here at ICANN and work together to strengthen multi-stakeholder internet governance.

SHREYA TIWARI

Thank you, David. Next, I am going to request Patricia, who has joined us over Zoom. CIPESA worked with GNI and GPD to organize a regional meeting at the Africa IGF in Tanzania. Do you see any learnings or priorities from those conversations reflected in the outcome document? What are your reflections on the final text, and what is needed at the regional level in Africa to support the implementation of WSIS?

PATRICIA

Thank you. We had these conversations during the Africa IGF, starting with the evolving landscape of WSIS. We had a cocktail of practitioners because we wanted multi-stakeholder input. We highlighted the journey from Geneva to Tunis and the current review. Participants underscored framework efforts in developing regions and special attention was given to how the review intersects with emerging frameworks such as the GDC. Discussions emphasized strengthening Africa's position and avoiding duplicative or conflicting multilateral efforts. Participants called

for a harmonized approach that prioritizes human rights and inclusive development.

Common challenges identified included low public awareness of the process, inadequate coordination mechanisms at the national level, and limited participation in global negotiations. We stressed the need to designate clear national focal points to disseminate information on WSIS milestones. There was a call for the African Union Commission and sub-regional bodies like UNECA to consolidate African positions reflecting shared concerns around digital access, rights, and capacity building. We also discussed funding inequalities. Members observed that limited participation in global forums often mirrors existing geopolitical and economic disparities, resulting in the underrepresentation of African stakeholders due to travel costs and language barriers.

Participants called for equitable funding models prioritizing grassroots organizations and youth-led initiatives. We further called for empowering African Union missions in Geneva and New York with the expertise to influence global digital policymaking. Civil society was recognized as a key stakeholder group in advancing policy debates on digital rights, access, and cybersecurity. There was a call for tangible commitments to safeguard online freedoms and protect civic space. We also talked about maintaining the IGF's relevance and urged sustainable financing and stronger linkages to policy outcomes. Lawmakers and legal experts in the room provided insights into how

international norms can be integrated into national frameworks regarding data protection and digital inclusion.

Journalists and fact-checkers reflected on the growing threats to information integrity. They emphasized the roles of press freedom and online safety, highlighting partnerships between media and civil society to counter disinformation during elections. Regarding next steps, participants proposed strengthening national coordination structures, developing regional position papers ahead of UN sessions, and leveraging platforms like the Africa IGF and DRIF for broader African input. Establishing a knowledge-sharing platform for African stakeholders was also recommended. In the end, the regional workshop underscored Africa's need to take a more assertive role in global digital governance to create a roadmap for accountable governance.

SHREYA TIWARI

Thank you, Patricia. I am going to now open the space for questions. We have a question from Henriette on Zoom: To date, the IGF, including national and regional IGFs, touched only partially on broader WSIS action lines, with the primary focus being internet-specific policy issues. Do you think it is a good idea to evolve these national and regional IGFs to play a wider WSIS and GDC follow-up and implementation role?

WISDOM DONKOR

My name is Wisdom, chair for NCUC. I am trying to understand the connection between this and the extensive presentations provided. I have been a MAG member and part of the Africa Working Group under UNECA. I want to understand the relationship between this and the NCUC and what exactly you want us to help with. Regarding the answer to the previous question, I will say yes. Over the last two decades, the IGF has done very well, but WSIS itself has not. The action lines are more toward government, and we do not see many governments attending WSIS meetings.

Even within the developing world, participation is low. High-level discussions often do not reach the ground level. Looking at the action lines, we need more infrastructure. When you talk at a high level, who is going to implement those policies? There are many gaps to fill regarding the WSIS action lines. I think this should be part of the IGF itself. The IGF should push this because we have NRIs in all African countries and Europe. They are making the IGF very strong. If the NRIs are recognized, they can push the government. Within the NRIs, there are government representatives on the advisory committees. We need to work together with civil societies. My response is yes.

SHREYA TIWARI

Thank you, Wisdom. I agree. I will also open it to Sukriti, David, and Patricia.

SUKRITI GOVIL

I agree 100% with what was just said. It is important because the document is not explicit in recognizing actionable implementation measures. This approach helps elevate community voices because the outcome document recognizes emerging tech. It recognizes broader principles of fairness and transparency, but we need to put them into practice. Lastly, it helps sustain these conversations on implementation. We need to ensure that the critical questions raised during the review do not die down over time and that we continue to invite participation from grassroots and regional contexts.

DAVID

It is a really important question touching on two key areas. The first is the role of the NRIs within this ecosystem. Some are flourishing, but others, especially in the Global South, are struggling due to a lack of financial support. This is a big question that has been referred to the UN Secretary-General. Second, how can we build better connections between dialogue-based forums like the IGF and decision-making forums like ICANN? I do not have the answer, but it is a perceived gap within the ecosystem. The answer is not necessarily giving the IGF decision-making powers, but we need to build a better bridge between it and the decision-making parts of the ecosystem. Now that the dust is settling on WSIS Plus 20, we can start to engage on those big questions.

SHREYA TIWARI

Thanks, David. Henriette has her hand up on Zoom. Would you like to share your thoughts?

HENRIETTE ESTERHUYSE

Thank you, Shreya. Henriette Esterhuyse here, NCUC member. There is no formalized bottom-up participation process for WSIS follow-up. The WSIS Forum in Geneva is open to all, but at the national and regional level, it is ad hoc. In Africa, follow-up has been led by the UN Economic Commission, and similarly in Latin America, but it is less so in Asia. We need more consistent bottom-up participation. This is an opportunity for the IGF ecosystem to consolidate its role. The review process is changing to every two years, which creates an opportunity for us to have a cycle of national and regional monitoring and reporting feeding into the global reporting.

Regarding David's point on making the link between discussion and policymaking forums, do you have suggestions on how the IGF can do that effectively? In response to Wisdom's question about relevance for ICANN and the NCUC, I would say there are two areas. One is bottom-up inclusive deliberation and decision-making in digital spaces, which is a project ICANN pursues within the DNS context. Second is digital equality and inclusion. In Africa, the DNS space is not growing rapidly because we have so much digital inequality. Achieving the WSIS vision of an inclusive information society is necessary for a stronger and more diverse DNS space.

DAVID

I can share a little bit about the discussion from the CIRA Technical Community Summit. There is a lot of overlap between those who attend the IGF and those who attend ICANN. There may be scope for issue champions to take an outcome from an IGF discussion and bring it into ICANN where decisions can be made. These are the conversations the wider community should be having.

SHREYA TIWARI

Thanks, David, and thanks to Henriette. We have another question from the group.

SANVI

This is Sanvi for the record. This is more of a suggestion. Youth IGFs are a great initiative, and their work at regional levels is great. However, teenagers make up a significant portion of internet users, and we see absolutely no teenagers present here. WSIS highlights the importance of youth inclusion, but many teenagers are not even aware of spaces like ICANN or WSIS. What steps can be taken to increase awareness among teenagers and create accessible pathways for their meaningful participation? What concrete mechanism is ICANN planning to ensure genuine teen participation rather than simply referring to youth in policy documents?

NEHA

I am Neha, an IP lawyer. A forum shaping the digital world should include those who are raised by the internet and will witness the

consequences in the long run. We conducted sessions like the Unreal campaign to help teens understand counterfeiting in online shopping. We should conduct these awareness campaigns in these spaces as well and include teens where the impact is greatest.

YAO SOSSOU

This is Yao speaking for the record. I am an NPAC ExComm member representing the Youth IGF from Benin. Regarding teens in the IGF, there is a dynamic coalition on teens in the IGF that already exists. They are doing a lot of outreach, and the coordinator is actually from India. It is worth checking the website and reaching out to them to see how you can help raise awareness about teen engagement.

SHREYA TIWARI

Thank you for that connection. I also know there are youth IGF fellowships that run in India and elsewhere. We have a few minutes remaining. Sukriti, David, and Patricia, what is the most effective way for civil society and the technical community to engage governments on implementation at the national level?

SUKRITI GOVIL

I think direct engagement with the government is one way, though opportunities are fewer. Changing our approach to NRIs creates space for this. We should also engage with different stakeholders, including the technical community, so that those conversations translate into engagement with the government. We must sustain

the research and work created by this review process, identifying opportunities for engagement and understanding where finances need to be directed. Global forums are useful for engagement because of the presence of multiple stakeholders, but Global South communities face barriers due to resource availability. In India, we had a good experience, but we need wider ways to enable that engagement.

DAVID

Looking forward, the outcome of WSIS Plus 20 is fragile, meaning we need to keep engaging. It is also conditional; many states in the Global South went along with it on the basis that the multi-stakeholder model must deliver for everyone. We saw the value of government engagement in the final months of negotiations. Having strong relationships is key, and some governments even included technical community representatives on their delegations. It is a two-way street. Government negotiators are often generalists, while we are specialists. We can learn from each other. Building a relationship with the government should not be a one-off transaction. It is hard for civil society to get meetings, so do not just stay in broadcast mode. Listen to them and build a healthy relationship that lasts beyond one meeting.

PATRICIA Given the low public awareness of the process in Africa, we can build on the idea of bottom-up participation to have more conversations with our legislators toward implementation.

SHREYA TIWARI Thank you to the panelists and everyone for joining. I will pass back to Rafik to close this out.

RAFIK DAMMAK Thanks, everyone, for making it to the end of this long day. Thanks to our partners at GPD and GNI and the panelists for this useful session. With that, we can close the meeting. You are free for today.

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