COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

Twenty-sixth session
Geneva, 27-31 March 2023

Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2022 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Submission by

Internet Society

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 26th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

Internet Society's contribution to the CSTD Annual Report of WSIS Outcomes

1. Executive summary

The Internet Society, a global non-profit organization with a mission to support an open, globally-connected, trustworthy, and secure Internet, has remained active in supporting the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) recommendations, commitments and targets. They provide us with the solid foundation to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Internet has been recognized as a critical enabler of social and economic change and offers new ways of addressing development challenges. The Internet Society believes that its work in support of the single open and interoperable Internet ensures that it continues to make an important contribution to sustainable development worldwide.

However, accelerating technological innovation and the digitization of essential services like healthcare and education are leading to a broader digital divide. Some countries and local communities benefit from fast and affordable Internet connections, while others lack access altogether. These growing divides reduce the potential of the Internet to support the achievement of SDGs.

In addition, there are emerging major threats to the open Internet model that could negatively impact the Internet and its properties. Some pose a serious risk to the Internet as we know it today and to its future. Internet fragmentation - also called "Splinternet" - and Internet shutdowns are two of the most challenging trends we are now seeing.

Within this context of escalating threats, the Internet Society is working at the local, national and international levels to grow, protect and strengthen the Internet. We believe it is even more important now to continue working with the technology sector, national policymakers and regulators in shaping how the world accesses and benefits from the Internet, and to showcase how the Internet and its model of multistakeholder governance are essential for the success of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

2. Overview of Trends and Experiences

Internet Fragmentation - Splinternet

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There is a growing number of government and corporate decisions across the world that have the potential to adversely impact the open and interoperable global Internet, sometimes without even realizing. One of them is widely referred to as the "Splinternet" when the Internet is carved up along political, economic, technological boundaries. This is in a fundamental contradiction to the original principles of the Internet, which was intended to be borderless and globally connected with data flowing freely and securely across the world. The Internet Society is gravely concerned about this trend and continues to work with its community of stakeholders worldwide in support of sustaining the single, globally interoperable open Internet.

Internet shutdowns

The escalating trend in Internet shutdowns, which started some years ago, remains a major concern. It is becoming an increasingly common policy for governments to intervene and shut down the Internet at the national or sub-national level for primarily political objectives. The Internet Society believes Internet shutdowns harm societies, economies, and the technical infrastructure of the global digital economy. We are therefore working to encourage governments and decision-makers everywhere to support policies that keep the Internet on and resilient as the foundation for modern economies that provides people with and to give people the opportunity for a more prosperous and secure future. Internet shutdowns constitute a major risk for many businesses and investors, including those who are building infrastructure and/or developing services.

2. Internet Society's role in promoting innovative policies through its project-based programme

The Internet Society provides extensive project-based experience and expertise regarding connectivity, inclusiveness, and capacity building. In relation to the WSIS Action Lines, Internet Society's project-based priorities are:

WSIS Action Line C1: Governance and promotion of ICTs for development

- Supporting the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to strengthen its multi stakeholder mechanisms, deliver tangible results and to ensure it is seen as a platform for informing global, regional, and national policymakers.
- Promoting awareness of multistakeholder governance models that support the open, interoperable and affordable Internet. Several successful examples reflect the value of the multistakeholder approach: security best practices such as Mutually Agreed Norms for Routing Security (MANRS), and collaborative local and regional initiatives such as community networks (CNs) which provide affordable connectivity in remote rural areas. They all contribute to reaching the WSIS targets.

WSIS Action Line C2: Information and Communication Infrastructure

- Sustaining the single interoperable and open global Internet that keeps networks fully operational.

- Growing the peering ecosystem through developing local and regional Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) globally and strengthening interconnection so that the Internet is more affordable, faster, and more resilient.

- Advocating against non-technical Internet shutdowns which impact human rights and freedom of expression, harm social welfare, undermine national economies and interfere with the global Internet infrastructure. The Internet Society monitors shutdown events and assesses these actions' economic and human impacts.

WSIS Action Lines C3: Access to information and knowledge

- Supporting the facilitation of the free flow of data across borders.

- Establishing complementary and holistic access solutions in underserved and unserved remote areas, such as community networks, by promoting local partnerships and securing the support of governments.

WSIS Action Lines C3: C4: Capacity building

- Developing capacity-building activities to equip and empower the next generation of Internet champions.

- Developing local capacity-building initiatives to promote the growth of interdisciplinary skills and competencies for fostering a Internet environment.

WSIS Action Line C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs

- Mapping effective forms of digital governance, policies, and mechanisms.

- Measuring Internet resilience to provide meaningful, reliable, and understandable data about the health, availability, and evolution of the Internet.

- Reducing global routing threats through implementing globally-accepted routing security norms (MANRS).

Ongoing and initiatives under Internet Society's Strategic Action Plan

Internet Society's Strategic Action Plan 2022 describes a set of projects and initiatives that help grow and strengthen the Internet and empower people to take action in line with WSIS objectives.

The list of projects includes:

Growing the Internet

- Deploying and growing community networks
- Fostering sustainable peering infrastructure
- Enabling sustainable technical communities

- Measuring the Internet
- Understanding low earth orbit satellites and opportunities for the Internet

Strengthening the Internet

- Promoting Internet Way of Networking (IWN)
- Extending encryption
- Securing global routing
- Sharing cutting edge knowledge at NDSS
- Exploring digital sovereignty and opportunities for the Internet

Empowering people to take action

- Sharing knowledge globally to inspire action locally
- Mobilizing individual members
- Driving action through knowledge
- Empowering Internet advocates strengthening
- Strengthening our community connections and participation
- Shaping legal precedent in alignment with our mission

Community at the center

The Internet Society has a community of energetic and committed individual members, organization members, chapters, and special interest groups who bring positive change for the Internet by taking action in their communities and regions. We also have a trusted network of partners that work with us and support our extensive list of projects.

For example, in Zimbabwe, we worked with national operator TELONE to establish the Murambinda community network. This helped inform changes to Zimbabwean regulation to allow the use of 2.4 and 5 GHz spectrum for rural broadband connectivity. In Brazil, we advocated support for the local chapter and partners against potentially damaging aspects of proposed legislation on fake news (the bill was later repealed).

With the support of our community, we have also produced a number of Internet Impact Briefs that assessed emerging policies in Asia, North America, and Europe. The Internet Society's Internet Impact Assessment Toolkit (IIAT), a tool to help our community as well as policymakers to assess potential impacts on the Internet, was the framework of this work. It supports decision-making by governments and businesses by identifying the critical properties of the "Internet Way of Networking" conceptual approach developed by the Internet Society as they relate to the evolution of the Internet's infrastructure. These take into account network conditions, proposals for technological development, regulations and technical and policy governance arrangements. The IIAT provides an accessible tool for all stakeholders in the Internet community to assess

potential Internet threats and impacts, and to support achieving the WSIS vision and the UN Roadmap on Digital Cooperation.

Capacity building

People who champion the Internet are at the heart of Internet Society activities. This is why in 2022 we have consolidated and expanded our Empowerment programs.

This year, Learning @ Internet Society, our training and professional development program, has offered learning opportunities to more than 10,000 community members and supporters. Course topics include Community Networks, Routing Security, Internet Governance, Privacy, and Network Operations.

The Internet Society also offers fellowships programs to equip decision-makers, technical experts, and influencers with the knowledge they need to be stronger advocates for an open, globally-connected, secure, and trustworthy Internet.

Launched in 2021, the Early-Career Fellowship program is designed for talented Internet champions who recently started in their profession and have a demonstrated interest and impressive potential across various Internet-related topics. The program is coordinated with four key partners that help support it through financial sponsorship, contribution to the program's curriculum, or mentoring and training the fellows.

In 2022, we have launched the Mid-Career Fellowship program – designed for professionals further along in their Internet-related career – which serves as a training progression for working professionals, helping them to amplify their potential impact.

Lastly, we also offer leadership programs such as the IGF Youth Ambassador Program, which is designed to equip the next generation of Internet leaders to collaborate and innovate and influence Internet governance within their regions and at the national, regional and global IGFs.

Research and grants

The Internet Society Foundation provides research and grants programs with the aim of strengthening the Internet in function and reach so that it can effectively serve all people.
The Internet Society Foundation's Research Program supports global research collaboration that advances understanding of the Internet and its value for all. This includes support for integrated approaches to investigating the real or potential impact of the Internet on our society and the environment. The program's objectives are:

Promote novel methodologies that generate solutions to Internet-related challenges;
Identify and support a diverse and collaborative group of researchers and research institutions;
Facilitate access to intersectional research that can be applied to decision-making in government and industry.

In addition, the Internet Society Foundation Grants programs focus on the following issues:

Economic inclusion and educational opportunities: the Strengthening Communities/Improving Lives and Livelihoods (SCILLS) grant program aims to contribute to economic inclusion and increase educational opportunities by supporting individuals and communities to more knowledgeably and skillfully use the Internet. This aim is aligned with the Internet Society's purposes to promote educational applications of the Internet, to promote the Internet's development, evolution, or use to benefit people and to stimulate and educate communities on the Internet's use and application. This is also directly aligned with WSIS Action Line C3.

Development of innovative methods, technologies, and infrastructure that enhances Internet connectivity and access: BOLT Grants Program aims to support teams of creatives, technologists, researchers, and social/cultural workers to design and build prototypes and pilots that will bring into reality innovative solutions to Internet connectivity particularly among communities where current technologies are unavailable or not readily accessible.
Emergency responses: the Emergency Response Program provides funding to organizations working on projects that utilize the Internet to improve lives during or in response to an emergency situation.

Support local communities: the Beyond the Net Small Grant Program offers funding to support Internet Society Chapters to implement short-term projects with a goal of providing learning and engagement opportunities as well as strengthening the Chapter relationships, partnerships, and presence in the surrounding community.

3. The way forward: protecting the Internet for today and tomorrow

For many, the Internet has become the foundation of our lives, and we rely upon it without considering what makes it work or who makes it possible. However, at least 2.7 billion people still do not have access.

Furthermore, as highlighted earlier in this submission, the Internet is also experiencing many threats. Some pose a serious risk to the very existence of the Internet in the future. In particular, Internet shutdowns threaten Internet resilience and prevent people from accessing the global Internet. Furthermore, there is a growing risk that the Internet will become fragmented into

separate networks dominated by governments and corporations which control what people see and what services they use.

The Internet Society strongly believes that if these trends are not resisted, they will break the globally connected Internet and undermine all the benefits and opportunities for enhanced social welfare and economic opportunity that flow from it. The Internet Society will continue working to grow the Internet for everyone and to protect the Internet from these threats. It will do this in coordination with its global community and in collaboration with other stakeholders in a multi stakeholder framework of digital cooperation.

In growing and protecting the Internet, the Internet Society is also committed to working with the UN, including the Office of the Envoy for Technology, intergovernmental organizations, regional public bodies, individual governments, business and technical communities and civil society.

The Internet Society looks forward in particular to working with government and non-government stakeholders worldwide in contributing to the development of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) as a key outcome of agreed principles and actions at the Summit of the Future in 2024. In particular, we strongly recommend that the Presidency of the General Assembly facilitates a fully inclusive and open multistakeholder process for the Summit's digital track and for the finalisation of the scope and provisions of the GDC.