

Internet Governance Forum 2023

Hybrid Open Forum Event

WSIS at 20: successes, failures and future expectations  
Room E, Kyoto International Conference Center & Zoom  
15:15-16:45 (JST/UTC+9)  
Tuesday, 10 October 2023

**Opening Remarks by the Head of the CSTD Secretariat**

Good afternoon/good morning/good evening to everyone here and online.

As Head of the CSTD Secretariat, I join our chair in welcoming you to this CSTD open consultation on the WSIS+20 Review.

I also wish to express my appreciation for the presence of Mr. Yoichi Ida, Deputy Director General for G7/G20 Relations of the Government of Japan, to deliver a keynote address on behalf of the host country.

I am sure that we all agree that the WSIS vision of a "people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society" remains as valid as ever. I am sure too that as we all acknowledge the profound transformations that ICTs – or digitalization to use the current term – has enabled, we are equally concerned by how much remains to be done for that vision to be a reality:

While 95% of the world's population live today within range of a mobile broadband network, only 40 per cent of Africans are online. If one looks at the LDCs as a whole, just 36 per cent of their people are connected. Women, too, remain digitally marginalized in many of the world's poorer countries.

These divides have become serious development divides, or as the COVID pandemic taught us, divides between those who could get on with their lives almost normally and those who were left in lockdown and isolation and often lost their livelihoods.

Moreover, the breathtaking technological change since WSIS creates fascinating possibilities. It also adds complexity to the strategic choices of developing countries. The multidimensional impact of data, or the wide-ranging emerging capabilities of artificial intelligence attract in equal measure attention,

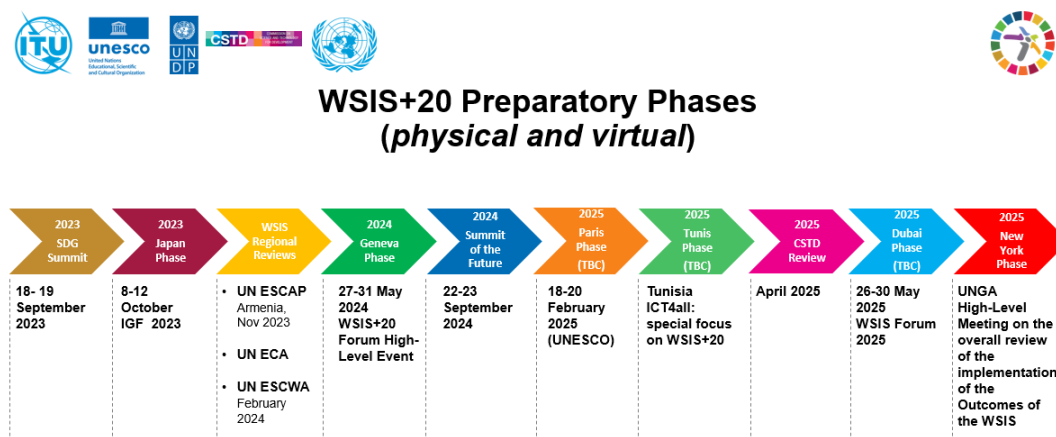
investment and fears. There is an urgent need for the international system to come up with inclusive normative and operational responses to those powerful trends.

Today the CSTD is opening a consultation process in which you can help shape those responses. We want your input about the lessons of the twenty years of WSIS implementation that can help the world navigate these uncharted waters. We want to hear about the new themes, threats and opportunities that need responses from the UN system. We also ask you as WSIS stakeholders to tell us about ways to ensure that the WSIS process contributes to preserve and improve multilateral cooperation in the digital sphere.

Digital technologies may be the most powerful instrument we have for accelerating the SDGs and rescuing people and the planet from the cascading crisis that we face. But we must come together to make it happen. If we have learned something from WSIS is that we need all the stakeholders, like the IGF – a WSIS creation – so brilliantly illustrates. This multistakeholder approach will inform the WSIS +20 consultation process that we launched today.

As CSTD secretariat we are proud of the partnership we have established with other key WSIS players like ITU, UNESCO and UNDP in this review process.

*[Our colleague Eva will put up the timeline of the various WSIS processes over the years showing the different agencies' contributions]*



And as an example of this interagency collaboration, we have jointly circulated a questionnaire to seek stakeholder inputs for the WSIS+20 review. Please help us circulate it among your networks.

Let me end here. And I look forward to a productive discussion.