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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2023 to
implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

Submission by

Association for Progressive Communications

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Flow of information for the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

Report to CSTD November 2023

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1. Executive summary

We are living in a context of heightened global distress, and a pervasive sense of uncertainty and rapid change. It is marked by a horrific intensification of violence and an escalation of conflicts such as in Palestine, Israel, Sudan, Ethiopia and Myanmar, and a protracted war in Ukraine. It is a context that is characterised by the rapid digitalisation and datafication of societies, with fragile economies in the global South still attempting to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is scarred by a resurgence of right-wing nationalism and fundamentalism in many countries, alongside the legitimisation of misogyny and anti-rights discourses, and the increasing precarity of Black, brown and diverse bodies.

APC's activities over the past year have covered a variety of elements relating to the achievement of WSIS goals. APC continued to address key issues faced by civil society, in particular, digital exclusion, digitally mediated threats to the expression of human rights, and the role of digital technologies in responses to the environmental crisis.

2. Trends and Experiences in the Implementation of WSIS outcomes

In the digital sphere, the following key tensions that affect action toward achievement of the WSIS goals can be observed:

A failure of global governance, deepening inequalities

In 2020, speaking at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for a “New Social Contract, between Governments, people, civil society, business.”¹ His purpose was to address the stark global inequalities made evident by the pandemic, and to offer some way to redress the underlying causes of these inequalities, including historical injustices, “from colonialism and patriarchy to racism and the digital divide.”² In doing so, he identified both digitalisation and climate change as likely having the most serious impact on a sustainable future, with both threatening to widen inequalities further if not addressed through concerted global cooperation. “The COVID-19 pandemic made established and emerging structural challenges

1 <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-07-18/secretary-generals-nelson-mandela-lecture-%E2%80%9Ctackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era%E2%80%9D-delivered>

2 <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/a-new-social-contract-for-a-new-era-2/>

related to inequality, discrimination, exclusion and violence more palpable and highlighted tensions around the continuum between the exercise of human rights online and offline.”³ Instead of the cohesion and solidarity necessary to address global inequalities in a fractured post-COVID environment, the opposite has occurred. In a period that has been accurately described as symptomatic of a “failure of global governance”, geopolitics have become more polarised, particularly around regional wars and conflicts. A rise in global poverty, insecurities of livelihoods, and uncertainty of home through forced mass migration and the further displacement of peoples are all anticipated. All of these fractures and divisions play out distinctly for people and communities across the world, and in different ways mitigate against the possibility of global cooperation and solidarity in order to address the pressing issues of the time.

The increase in rights violations across the globe

The growing strength of reactionary and populist politics, as well as authoritarianism, is resulting in an increase in human rights violations and a narrowing of civic space in many countries across the world. Minorities and women are often the worst affected by these violations, both online and offline. In response, in 2023, APC continued its efforts around the promotion of an intersectional gender approach to international and national cybersecurity policies⁴ that centres people in harm and threat responses.

State collusion with big business exacerbates violations. The rapid digitalisation of societies has assisted this shift to the right, with social media platforms facilitating polarisation through disinformation and propaganda, and censoring through content take-downs. Tech corporations are also complicit in many human rights abuses through the provision of security, monitoring and surveillance technologies to states that turn on their citizens. Many governments use private sector platforms to deliver public services, with few mechanisms ensuring transparency and accountability with respect to privacy, data use and algorithms, or on the nature of the arrangements reached with the platforms. This has aligned the market needs of the private sector with the desire of states to control and manage their citizens and peoples, a trend already evident in the previous strategic plan. The potential of new technologies using artificial intelligence to intensify the information disorder, weaken public trust, and manipulate voters during elections strengthens this complicity, and poses very real threats to democratic stability in countries across the globe.

Based on APC’s flagship annual publication, APC contributed to the analysis of the human rights implications of use of digital technologies and mobile communications by governmental initiatives to combat the pandemic, in the framework of the World Public Sector Report 2023. It highlights that “the COVID-19 pandemic made established and emerging structural challenges related to inequality, discrimination, exclusion and violence more palpable and highlighted tensions around the continuum between the exercise of human rights online and offline.”⁵

A new digital divide

The global instability being experienced – particularly with respect to failing economies, the stresses placed on livelihoods, and climate change – is also not likely to be easily mitigated through intensifying the pace of digitalisation and datafication of economies, as some may hope. Instead, as COVID-19 showed, digitalisation resulted in the further marginalisation of unconnected communities, and was not successful in many countries in the world in bringing more people online. Research has also suggested⁶ that a new digital divide is emerging which is insufficiently addressed by stepping up infrastructure roll-out plans. To properly participate in the data economy and its potential for innovation and development, there will be a greater need for affordable,

3 <https://publicadministration.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/2023/WPSR%202023%20Chapter%201.pdf>

4 <https://www.apc.org/en/node/38838>

5 [*WPSR 2023 Chapter 1.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

6 https://researchictafrica.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/core-project-report_20231010.pdf

dedicated internet connections, and for meaningful internet access. Without this, not just the unconnected, but those who are “barely online” due to multiple factors including high data costs and the costs of devices, are likely to be left behind, with a rise in global inequalities and new forms of marginalisation as a result. Participation in the digital economy will require broad-based and significant improvements in areas such as education, technical literacy and skills, and urgent action to bring down the cost of access, which governments and regulators in many countries in the global South have, until now, failed to do.

Communications infrastructure

Despite growing needs for environmental monitoring as well as the more general social and economic development imperatives which argue for ensuring universal access to connectivity, these needs have not so far been reflected in the required growth in the numbers of those who are actually connected. The growth rate of internet users has continued to decline since the COVID peak, and the reported⁷ number of people using the internet only grew by 2.1 percent over the 12 month period to July 2023. As a result only about 65% of the world population currently have some form of Internet access, which means that at the current rate of progress, universal connectivity will not be reached by the 2030 target for the SDGs. It is also worthy of note here that women are still significantly under represented online, with a report⁸ from GSMA indicating that women are 19 percent less likely than men to use mobile internet. Furthermore, the report finds that the internet adoption rate amongst women has slowed for the second year in a row, this means that 100 million women per year will need to start using the internet between now and 2030 if the digital gender gap is to close in time to reach the SDGs.

There are a variety reasons for the declining rate of internet growth, but one of the primary causes is that it becomes increasingly expensive to extend national networks to reach more remote and poorer areas that are still uncovered, while the returns on the investment in infrastructure that is needed are proportionately lower. To help address this, APC has taken the position that instead of imposing one single access model on deployment of the Internet in most of these areas (mobile broadband), it is necessary to support local communities to build their own infrastructure.

Community-led, self-provided, access helps to empower communities with connectivity that is more suited to their needs and helps to keep the circulation of more of the financial resources spent on connectivity within the community. This strategy is at the heart of APC’s LocNet project, which has continued to work in 2023 to build the capacity of rural communities in the global south to deploy communications infrastructure. This includes working with national regulators and policy makers to ensure that the enabling environment is in place to support these types of small scale networks. National licensing requirements are usually designed for large commercial operators and are too burdensome for small scale, often non-profit operators, in addition access to radio spectrum is often insufficient, and operator licensing, interconnection requirements and fees are not adjusted for small networks. A leading example of progress in this area is the low cost Community Networks license that APC helped develop⁹ with the Communications Authority of Kenya, for which the first licenses to non-profit community entities were issued in mid 2023.

Aside from the capacity building that is needed, and eliminating the regulatory challenges that community-led infrastructure builders face, APC has been promoting the use of Universal Service Funds (USFs) to provide the necessary startup funds for these networks to begin. As part of this

7 <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-july-global-statshot>

8 https://www.gsma.com/r/gender-gap/?utm_source=DataReportal&utm_medium=article&utm_campaign=gender-gap-2023

9 <https://www.apc.org/en/news/kenya-adopts-community-networks-licensing-framework>

strategy APC helped to organise a session¹⁰ at the 2023 IGF on Revitalizing Universal Service Funds to Promote Inclusion.

Another concern that APC has been addressing is the perception that connectivity is binary – either you have it or you don't – when in actuality the situation is much more nuanced. A key aspect here is affordability – many may be connected, but few may actually be able to use the internet to its full potential because metered mobile broadband is often too expensive for the average citizen in the global south. Similarly, many cannot afford the smart devices that provide access to multimedia learning, financial services, e-government or even to verify their identity in return for access.

To highlight these aspects of internet connectivity, APC has continued to promote the concept of 'meaningful access' which takes into account these and other barriers to usage, such as digital literacy and access useful or relevant content. In addition, in its input¹¹ to the GDC earlier this year, APC pointed out that without consideration of the local realities and needs, simply "connecting everyone" may have adverse effects rather than positive ones oriented to ensure social, environmental and gender justice, as well as an open, free and secure digital future. During the 2023 IGF, APC highlighted the importance of enabling meaningful community-centred connectivity, i.e. connectivity that operates in a local context where it is affordable and accessible in terms of the locally used language(s), location and devices, with the use of the connectivity meeting expressed needs of the community and adding value to people's personal, social and/or economic lives.

To provide more a more substantive evidence base for these complementary models of connectivity provision APC began a major research initiative in Q4 2023 to conduct a comparative economic and social impact study of the different technical, operating and ownership models of infrastructure provision. The results of this will be published in early 2024.

These and other such efforts also need to take into account that the WSIS goals aiming to encourage the use of the internet should be accompanied by measures from governments and the private sector to help ensure that the internet is free from security threats, exploitation and abuses to personal privacy, online gender based violence, discrimination and other human rights abuses. This further reinforces the importance of WSIS Action line C10 relating to the Ethical dimensions of the Information Society.

These and many other local connectivity infrastructure related issues continue to be published in APC's community networks newsletter¹².

Growing alienation, and environmental cost

The personal and environmental cost of digitalisation affecting all aspects of society and people's lives has not been properly taken into account. This includes the digital alienation that is the result of the datafication and commodification of personal lives and interactions, and the alienation from the environment that is the result of the massive roll-out and use of technologies. These technologies are dependent for their production on the extraction of raw materials and the displacement of peoples and acquisition of land in the global South, as well as exploitative labour practices involving low-paid workforces. Their use results in an escalating contribution of the tech sector to climate catastrophe through greenhouse gas emissions,¹³ and environmental stress caused by e-waste being dumped in countries in Asia and Africa, particularly in impoverished local communities. The environmental cost, displacement of peoples, human and labour rights violations,

10 <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2023-ws-292-revitalizing-universal-service-funds-to-promote-inclusion>

11 <https://www.apc.org/en/node/38674>

12 <https://www.apc.org/en/community-networks-and-local-access-monthly-newsletter>

13 <https://circulartech.apc.org/books/a-guide-to-the-circular-economy-of-digital-devices/page/a-guide-to-the-circular-economy-of-digital-devices>

and environmental racism that accompany the production, use and disposal of technology, are likely to increase dramatically over the medium to long term.

APC has continued to prioritise in its work the role of digital infrastructure in climate-change mitigation related issues. This work has been pursued from the point of view of helping to minimise digital's increasing environmental footprint (energy use and pollution created in the manufacture and disposal of digital devices and their energy sources (batteries in particular), as well as in improving the opportunities for digital to help address more cross cutting environmental issues, such as in improving the availability of low-cost IoT sensors which offer the potential to improve the capacity of civil society groups to support evidence-based decision making and policy development. For example APC Members organised a panel¹⁴ at the 2023 IGF on Promoting efficient E-waste management in Africa and Asia, and the APC LocNet project has provided support for the development of an open source 'smart' solar battery charger¹⁵ which maximises battery life and can also monitor air quality and soil moisture.

Considering that internet connectivity infrastructure is necessary to be able to transmit the data generated by IoT devices, increasing the use of these technologies will require more universal connectivity to support efforts to monitor climate change, environmental degradation and its sources, especially in the more remote and rural areas which are among the most vulnerable to the impact of environmental change.

The entrenched interests of big tech, and the struggle to regulate

The complex alliance between the interests of states and the corporate tech sector underpins the multiple and interlinking policy and regulatory challenges that the evolving digital context presents. While the United States and the European Union, among others, have taken steps to regulate and tax big tech companies and platforms, the structural role that big tech firms play in multiple spaces and areas of service provision to states, and the dependency of markets, including national economies, on the corporate tech sector, suggest that the impact of this regulation is likely to be limited in curbing their influence and power. Nationally based big tech platforms with global footprints have also shown to be useful to states in contexts of armed conflict with respect to censorship and the control of information. In these respects, the regulators are effectively in compromised positions.

In the global South, there have been some fresh attempts by governments to create the enabling policy and regulatory frameworks for the new era of digitalisation and datafication. For example, the African Union has published a new data policy framework to try to harmonise disparate country regulations so that African countries can better benefit from the data economy and to explore methods of taxing platforms that have no legal presence in their jurisdictions.¹⁶ There are also attempts to reinvigorate universal access funds, and support in a number of countries for community-centred connectivity initiatives,¹⁷ including due to the work of APC. However, many countries in the global South lack the capacity to properly participate in and influence global governance and agenda-setting forums. This vulnerability means that they are largely subject to the regulatory and policy agendas set by developed economies and powerful corporate actors.

The interests of powerful tech corporations as well as states in what is being referred to as "universal meaningful connectivity" also carries new risks that efforts in working with communities

14 <https://intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2023-lightning-talk-47-promoting-efficient-e-waste-management-in-africa-and-asia>

15 <http://elektrad.info/download/APC-FF-ESP32-OpenMPPT/FF-OpenMPPT-Generations-CCC-CAMP2023-17-08-2023.pdf>

16 [The African Union's Data Policy Framework: Context, Key Takeaways, and Implications for Data Protection on the Continent - Future of Privacy Forum \(fpf.org\)](#)

17 [Advocacy for community-led connectivity access in the global South | Global Information Society Watch \(giswatch.org\)](#)

to develop local access solutions based on the principles of network self-determination could be undermined. These include satellite connectivity enterprises by private sector actors already in a dominating position in the tech industry such as Starlink¹⁸ and Amazon. Meanwhile, fresh questions of the human rights commitments of big tech platforms have been raised, including through the loss in advocacy gains in Twitter/X dissolving its Trust and Safety Council, ongoing concerns about the labour rights of gig workers, and Amazon being linked to the trafficking of workers in Saudi Arabia.¹⁹

A minimising of spaces for civil society to be heard and fragmentation of policy-making processes, and silo-ised civil society agendas

There is a gradual minimising of civil society interests in policy spaces. A symptom of this is what seems to be a weakening commitment to inclusive and multistakeholder governance, most obviously through attempts to sideline the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in the process of forging a Global Digital Compact (GDC). This institutional destabilisation of the IGF has gone hand-in-hand with the apparent favouring of intergovernmental negotiations in the GDC process, the Summit of the Future, as well as other UN-related processes, rather than an acknowledgement of the need for a multistakeholder inclusive policy agenda on our digital future. Multilateral forums are becoming more difficult for civil society to access and impact.

The APC network made the GDC a priority in 2023 and engaged proactively by participating in numerous UN-led consultations, discussions and submissions. We worked in collaboration with APC's members and partners to present both context-specific cases from around the world, in particular ensuring representation of voices from the global South, as well as co-creating joint statements on thematic priorities such as meaningful connectivity and digital inclusion, an intersectional gender approach to access, people-centred cybersecurity and environmental protection. APC also continued its engagement with the IGF contributing to the discussion on the thematic tracks and advocating for its strengthening as a key piece in the digital governance and global digital cooperation ecosystems.

While there are some efforts to reinvigorate processes such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the flagging targets of the SDGs, other important policy initiatives largely dormant, or are ignored alongside the gains of the IGF as a collaborative space for co-learning, discussion and debate, with evidence of clear policy impacts in countries across the world.²⁰

Outside forums such as the IGF, internet policy-making and agenda-setting spaces have become fragmented, with multiple initiatives and policy-setting processes co-existing. This makes it difficult for any single organisation to keep up with developments, to develop the expertise to participate robustly in each space, and to effect necessary change. Participation is further limited by the clampdown on civil society in many countries, throttling their ability to engage, including through new sector regulations stifling the flow of donor funding, new tax laws and limitations imposed on the transfer of funding for activities, and barriers to travel through visa processes that increasingly deny the freedom of movement of actors in the global South.

These developments, which cannot be resolved in the short to medium term, have all undermined prospects for the global post-pandemic economic recovery and stability needed. They have eroded rights, and diminished the potential for cooperation around issues of shared concern, including climate change, a common digital future and the SDGs.

18 [Starlink and Inequality - Many Possibilities](#)

19 [Revealed: Amazon linked to trafficking of workers in Saudi Arabia | Amazon | The Guardian](#)

20 <https://theigfwewant.net/>

3. Outlook and Proposals

3.a Innovative policies, programmes and projects

Digital rights

In 2023, APC continued to strengthen the digital rights movement in the southeast Asian region, primarily by enabling new entrants (individual digital rights defenders and civil society organisations) in the digital rights space to advocate for and uphold digital rights.²¹ We worked with a cohort of 15 organisations or individuals from southeast Asia through three interrelated strategies: promoting closer relationships through network building across cohorts, building their capacity, and equipping the cohort to support their work, which will lead to better understanding of key issues related to digital rights and strategies to counter attacks and carry out advocacy.

Digital inclusion

The IGF dynamic coalitions on community connectivity along with the best practice forums on gender and access, and on local content, continue to be important forums for sharing knowledge, and identifying and spreading awareness of innovative practices that help enable complementary models of connectivity to address digital exclusion.

APC also finds that directly engaging with policy makers and regulators via their regulatory associations to be an effective approach to raising awareness and discussing concerns that may arise. The recently held Communications Regulators' Association of Southern Africa (CRASA) invited representatives from its 13 member states in July 2023 to take a deep dive into community networks as an alternative to promote digital inclusion in the region and invited the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) to facilitate it²².

Other important national policy approaches to improving connectivity that APC has been drawing attention to in a number of conferences and other events this year include:

- Dig-once and infrastructure sharing policies that reduce the cost of connectivity deployment by encouraging network operators to share the costs of infrastructure.
- All-of-government approaches which ensure that different government departments work together to synchronise their connectivity projects so that resource duplication is minimised and demand commitments are sufficient to incentivise operators to deploy the necessary infrastructure.
- The need for regulators to adopt use-it-or-share-it radio spectrum licensing regulations to ensure remote and rural areas can use these frequencies when the primary licensees are not using it, which also makes much more efficient use of this scarce resource.
- The continued importance of public access facilities which provide citizens with a venue in which high speed access and access devices are available along with a safe and welcoming space in which to navigate the internet and gain access to ancillary services such as assistance in locating relevant information resources, printing and training sessions.

Technology facilitated gender based violence, cybersecurity and cybercrime

Through research and consultations carried out, APC significantly contributed in 2023 to deepening the understanding of the differentiated impacts, needs, and vulnerabilities experienced by women and individuals with diverse gender identities in the context of cyber security.²³ We offered insights into how online gender-based violence, gendered disinformation, and misogynistic hate speech manifest across different regions,²⁴ as well as how to develop more effective responses. This has

21 <https://www.apc.org/en/project/digital-rights-collaborative-southeast-asia>

22 <https://www.apc.org/en/news/regulators-southern-african-countries-take-deep-dive-community-networks-alternatives-digital>

23 <https://www.apc.org/en/news/when-protection-becomes-threat-cybercrime-regulation-tool-silencing-women-and-lgbtqia-people>

24 <https://genderit.org/articles/issue-brief-feminist-frontiers-freedom-expression-online>

directly informed APC's advocacy efforts, strengthening our engagements on cybersecurity-related issues with our members, partners, as well as delegations, and policymakers at national, regional, and international levels. These collaborations have played a key role in advocating for policy change in cybersecurity discussions.²⁵ For instance, with different events, we have facilitated connections between UN actors working on gender and freedom of expression mandates, influencing, in particular, the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and national delegations' positions on gender issues. Examples of this include statements that have integrated our language and the collaborative efforts with diplomatic delegations, Inter Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and UN actors.

We also provided technical assistance and capacity-building²⁶ on how to integrate a gender perspective into cybersecurity policy. These efforts have raised awareness of the gender dimensions of cybersecurity both in civil society and policy-makers.²⁷

We strengthened our policy advocacy this year with a structured long-term approach to research and knowledge production towards policy engagement in FOE and gender issues (gendered disinformation, hate speech, security and human rights, due diligence, meaningful connectivity, environmental justice and inclusive internet governance). Concrete policy recommendations and briefs emerged from the unique research published by the APC's Feminist Internet Research Network.²⁸

We influenced digital rights policy from a feminist perspective in this period, accompanied partners to the 67th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and submitted a paper on Freedom of Expression (FOE) and participation in digital spaces at the session's expert group to influence its outcome document and the Secretary General's report. APC also closely collaborated with the UN Special Rapporteur on FOE to address disinformation's impact on their mandate.

Internet governance and global digital cooperation

AfriSIG

The 11th African School on Internet Governance (AfriSIG) 2023 was held from 13th – 18th September 2023 in Nigeria.²⁹ It took place immediately prior to the African Internet Governance Forum (AFIGF). The school marked 10 years of outstanding efforts to build and strengthen capacity of African leaders on internet governance and promoting multistakeholder participation. In the 2023 edition, the participation of legislators was paramount, AfriSIG 2023 had a total of 12 members of parliament from the Gambia, Kenya, Egypt, Botswana, Niger, Cameroon, DRC, Ghana, Djibouti, Namibia, and Malawi; and more than 40 fellows from civil society, media, government, academia, private sector and technical community. For the practicum component of AfriSIG 2023 was for fellows to produce a “multistakeholder national implementation and follow-up strategy” for the African Union Data Policy Framework, building on the current process taking place at the level of Regional Economic Commissions and member states, but with emphasis on the involvement of parliamentarians, civil society, business, the media and other non-state actors, including the technical community and academic and research institutions.³⁰

25 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/derechos-digitales-and-apc-contribution-ad-hoc-committee-elaborate-comprehensive-international>

26 <https://www.apc.org/en/node/38840/>

27 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/framework-gender-cybersec>

28 <https://www.apc.org/en/project/firn-feminist-internet-research-network>

29 <https://www.apc.org/en/news/afrisig-2023-assembled-stakeholders-and-parliamentarians-20-countries-help-implement-african>

30 <https://afrisig.org/practicum/>

The Global Digital Compact and the inclusion of gender as a key consideration in the process

APC's main contribution came in the form of its main Input to the Global Digital Compact, a consolidated set of recommendations with a focus on social, gender and environmental justice.³¹

As part of our commitment to the GDC process, APC engaged in consultations as a participant but also convened consultations within our networks and partners to identify common ground and key messages relating to earth justice and sustainable development,³² on one hand, and gender,³³ on the other hand.

APC and several members and partners jointly developed a set of 10 feminist principles for including gender in the GDC,³⁴ drawing from a range of sources such as the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 67; the conclusions of a UN Women & Equality Now consultation event at CSW; and a submission to the Global Digital Compact consultation by APC. These principles also draw on United Nations Human Rights Council (A/HRC) resolutions and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

We also co-organised a closed event on 7th October on the heels of the IGF in Kyoto, Japan, called "Putting gender equality at the heart of the Global Digital Compact", which was a series of conversations between member states and civil society organisations on how to make gender a cross-cutting theme of the GDC.³⁵

The Internet Governance Forum

For APC, the IGF remains at the heart of the internet governance ecosystem. APC staff and members engaged in a number of these sessions.³⁶ APC also had a booth at the IGF 2023 where visitors were able to learn more about APC's priorities³⁷ and campaigns, engage in activities and find interesting materials. We launched the #TheIGFWeWant campaign to call attention to the importance of the IGF.³⁸

APC's has reflected on what worked well and what did not work so well, in areas such as logistics, scheduling of workshops and sessions, challenges for onsite participation, and diversity and representation,³⁹ and offered recommendations for the 2024 IGF, mainly highlighting our concern about the selection of the host country for 2024.⁴⁰

Intersections of technology, environmental justice and sustainability

In 2023, we deepened work at the intersections of gender and environmental justice through a collaborative elaboration of a 'Feminist Principle of the Internet on the Environment', panels and workshops on digital rights discourse at these intersections, consultations and policy submissions to the UNSR and the GDC on earth justice and sustainable development. With participatory grants we supported members working on anti-extractive and circular approaches in transformative tech. We worked with Numun Fund on donor advocacy in feminist infrastructure, calling attention to resourcing feminist tech movements while at the Commission for the Status of Women, the Stockholm Internet Forum and Women Deliver. APC is now hosting a collaborative theory of

31 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/apc-input-global-digital-compact>

32 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/joint-submission-global-digital-compact-earth-justice-and-sustainable-development>

33 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/joint-submission-global-digital-compact-gender>

34 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/feminist-principles-including-gender-global-digital-compact-0>

35 <https://www.apc.org/en/news/gender-equality-should-be-centre-global-digital-compact-gdc>

36 <https://www.apc.org/en/news/highlights-apc-network-igf-2023>

37 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/apc-priorities-2023-internet-governance-forum>

38 <https://www.apc.org/en/news/join-campaign-strengthen-theigfwewant-we-all-are-motor-behind-its-success>

39 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/apcs-reflections-2023-internet-governance-forum-and-suggestions-2024>

40 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/joint-statement-internet-governance-forum-must-reverse-decision-make-saudi-arabia-its-next-host>

change development for a funder coalition towards earth justice in digital tech governance and standards.

APC presented a submission in response to the call for inputs issued by the Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment on Promoting Environmental Democracy: Procedural elements of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.⁴¹ The submission was made to raise alarms about the impacts of digital technologies for access to information, public participation and access to justice with effective remedies in the deployment of infrastructures and the global production chain that make digitalisation possible. Jointly with our member organisation Acción Ecológica, we also presented a submission in response to the call from the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples for contributions to the thematic report to be presented to the 54th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, with a focus on a just and ecological transition to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights.

3.b Future Actions and Recommendations

Communications infrastructure

As indicated above, APC will publish a detailed comparative analysis of different models of connectivity provision in early 2024. This will help guide funders and investors identify on the most effective types of initiatives when providing financial support to reduce the digital divide.

APC is collaborating with local and international civil society organisations to deploy public access facilities in Nigeria in early 2024.

Similarly, APC will be working in Kenya to support community networks deploy infrastructure and participate in the national free wifi hotspot initiative in the country.

Overall, APC calls for greater recognition of the right of people to meaningfully shape and use the internet and digital technologies to meet their specific needs and realities.

Similarly the development community needs to commit more resources to providing support for these processes while ensuring that strategies to overcome digital exclusion focus on the groups that have been traditionally excluded and marginalised.

Technology facilitated gender based violence, cybersecurity and cybercrime

Recommendations for States

- State responses cover a broad range, from denial, to omission or over regulation
- State actors sometimes lead the disinfo campaign (in country or foreign actors)
- Punitive approaches in regulation end up hurting the groups they allege to protect
- Responses should focus on privacy protection
- Implementation of existing laws that are in accordance with international human rights law and consider that hate speech applies on the grounds of sex and gender
- Authoritative definition of OGBV could have an important effect

Recommendations for Companies

- Content moderation in local language is important, as well as employing content moderators who are aware of local and regional context when they address reported content.
- Effective early warning systems should be deployed.
- Actions should be put in place to address virality, based on specific research on gendered disinformation.

41 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2023/promoting-environmental-democracy-procedural-elements-human-right-clean>

- Increased data should be made available and more transparency needed in relation to responses to online violence and disinformation.

We will maintain our commitment to producing research and analysis that informs and influences global discussions on cybersecurity. This includes deepening our understanding of the differentiated cyber security needs and harms faced by marginalized groups, ensuring their voices and experiences are considered in policy and norms development. It also includes research on gender impact assessments for the tech sector.

We will collaborate with the Special Rapporteur to submit a report to UNGA. This report will highlight the intersection of gender and freedom of expression, shedding light on the challenges posed by gendered disinformation and recommending actions to address them. As part of our global advocacy, we will also engage with the CEDAW to promote the inclusion of a clear and comprehensive definition of (online gender based violence) OGBV in their framework. This will contribute to stronger legal protections and international recognition of OGBV as a distinct form of violence against women. We will also work towards promoting access to data and establishing early warning systems to detect and respond to OGBV .

Overall, we will continue to emphasize the importance of addressing gendered disinformation in government responses. This includes advocating for its recognition and inclusion in codes of conduct, bills, and other policy measures aimed at countering disinformation and protecting individuals from online harm.

Environmental justice and digital technologies

APC expects to facilitate and convene a series of engagements, which include several co-learning and capacity building interventions and building the capacity of APC members, boundary partners and environmental justice actors through practical peer-to-peer knowledge exchanges. We will also prioritise researching environmental disinformation and its impact on environmental defenders. Additional research and mapping will be also conducted to properly identify capacity building needs in local access initiatives with respect to working with digital technologies for environmental sustainability. In addition, we will build the capacity of digital rights organisations to litigate, as litigation on digital rights issues has been shown to be effective in a number of instances in forcing legislative review or change, or halting processes that are underway.

WSIS+20 Review, the GDC and the Summit of the Future, the IGF, and the NetMundial+10

APC will continue to actively engage in key processes dealing with the configuration of the digital future. There has been little apparent attempt to reinterpret the principles and vision of the WSIS to ensure that the lessons learned from years of multistakeholder cooperation feed into future processes of internet policy, internet governance and global digital cooperation – as a set of parameters for safeguarding multistakeholderism, transparency, inclusivity, dialogue and accountability. Instead, there is a sense that these lessons are being set aside in an effort to reset the policy agenda for the envisaged new social contract that shapes the digital future. The WSIS+20 Review process is a key opportunity to revert the situation and APC will ensure its active engagement, substantive contribution and facilitation of civil society participation. It includes organising civil society convenings and developing substantive input.

APC intends to provoke fresh questions and offer informed analyses on the successes, failures and challenges of the WSIS process and outcomes in a changed context as well as to stimulate, contribute to and help frame the deliberations in upcoming WSIS+20 events from a civil society and social justice perspective. Key framing questions that will guide our engagement with the WSIS+20 Review process are:

- What in the WSIS outcomes has been achieved, and what has enabled those achievements?
- What has not been achieved, and what has prevented this from happening?
- Is the framing of the outcomes still relevant in a changed context?
- Given the above how can civil society best respond to the changed context in its advocacy work in order to achieve the spirit of an inclusive information society from which all people benefit?

We also continue to establish linkages between the WSIS processes, the GDC, the NetMundial+10 and other key processes, and advocate for the reinforcing of the multistakeholder approach and gender a key consideration for shaping the digital future. While negotiations on the shape and content of the GDC will begin soon, no mechanisms have been established for the effective participation of civil society. The recent announcement about the realisation of the NetMundial + 10 is encouraging in the perspective of bringing the multistakeholder approach to a new level.⁴²

42 <https://cgi.br/noticia/notas/netmundial-10-global-challenges-for-the-governance-of-the-digital-world/>