COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

Twenty-ninth session
Geneva, 20-24 April 2026

Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2025 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Submission by

Association for Progressive Communications

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 29th 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.

Contribution to the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development from the Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

Annual reporting on follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society 2025

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Part 1. Executive summary

Activities undertaken by APC towards implementation of the WSIS vision and programme of action

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) was established by seven founding organisations in 1990 as an international membership-based network working to mobilise emerging electronic information and communication networks for social justice and development. APC has grown into a respected network with a total of 73 organisational members and 44 associates active in 74 countries. APC and its members engage in a range of activities related to WSIS implementation, ranging from research and policy development to capacity building and institution strengthening.

WSIS+20 review

Throughout 2025 APC participated actively in the WSIS+20 review process, participating in the annual Commission on Science and Technology for Develpment (CSTD) session in April, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in May, the WSIS+20 High Level Event in Geneva in July and multiple consultations convened by UN DESA and UNGA. APC submitted inputs related to the WSIS+20 review to the CSTD, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), to the "Elements paper" and the "Zero Draft" of the outcome document. These submissions included some submitted directly by APC and some developed with civil society coalitions on gender, digital justice and human rights. APC also participated in cross-community inputs with the technical community and business groups.

APC also worked to strengthen collaboration related to WSIS among the different civil society coalitions, in particular between the global South-led Global Digital Justice Forum (GDJF) and the global North-led Global Digital Rights Coalition for WSIS (GDRC for WSIS). In July 2025 APC contributed to the creation of the WSIS+20 Civil Society Alliance. It includes the GDJF, the GDRC for WSIS and ICANN's Non-commerical Stakeholder Group (NCSG).

To encourage participation in the review APC published a WSIS+20 "policy explainer" and covered the process extensively on its website and in social media and newsletters.

Activities linked to one or more action lines

Action line C1. The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development

- APC implemented activities to affirm the WSIS principles of participation in light of new developments towards truly transparent, inclusive, accountable and democratic governance of digital technologies at all levels, building on the 2024 NETmundial+10 São Paulo Guidelines. This included an article on how these guidelines can be applied in the WSIS+20 review.
- **AfriSIG (African School on Internet Governance)**: AfriSIG is a six day-long residential learning and leadership development event convened annual by APC together with Research ICT Africa and the African Union Commission. In 2025 we partnered with the Ministry of ICT of the Government of Tanzania in organising AfriSIG in Dar es Salaam in May 2025. The ministry did not only host the event, they provided extensive in-kind support and sent 30 staff members to attend the event. Government officials, members of parliament as well as regulators from multiple other African countries were also present at the event together with participation from civil society, the media, business and the technical community. AfriSIG 2025's practicum produced an outcome document that was presented as an input to the CSTD Working Group on Data Governance.

Action line C2. Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for the Information Society

APC's Local Access Programme and LocNet project promotes the development and sustainability of community-owned networks to expand internet access in marginalized regions. LocNet works in close partnership with community networks with the ITU, regional and national telecoms regulators, and the Internet Society, Sida and the UK Government's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Activities implemented in 2025 include:

- **"Advancing Digital Inclusion through Community-Centred Connectivity" breakfast for regulators at the WSIS High Level Event in Geneva on 8 July:** Organised together with the Internet Society this invite-only event brought together telecoms regulators from Botswana, Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe to share best practices on how regulators are enabling local list/first mile solutions to meaningful connectivity.
- Self-sustaining financing solutions for Community Connectivity publication – the Official Outcome of the UN IGF Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity was published in mid-2025 and distributed at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the WSIS HL Event. It contains valuable research and policy guidelines on financing local access solutions.
- **Financing community-centred connectivity** G20/T20 side event in South Africa on 1 October 2025 with the FCDO, UNESCO and the T20 Task Force on Digital Transformation in Cape Town on 1 October 2025.
- APC member and LocNet partner Rhizomatica produced an open-hardware long distance digital communication tool based on HF radio called HERMES. The system allows independent and secure communications between two points virtually anywhere on the planet, with an easy to use touch screen interface. Hermes is already in use supporting

communications between indigenous settlements in the Amazon and among fishers in Bangladesh.

Action line C3: Access to information and knowledge

APC's approach to this action line overlaps with its work on Action Line C2 as we believe that community-centred connectivity solutions are valuable precisely because they are designed to provide access to infrastructure, content and skills in an integrated manner.

Action line C4: Capacity building

- AfriSIG **(already mentioned)**
- Implementation of the courses for ICT network managers in indigenous and rural communities APC developed with the ITU in LAC and adaptation and translation of these course for African participants. The African programme was launched mid-2025.

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

- APC worked to address online gender-based violence through advocacy, research, capacity building, and policy engagement, aiming to create safer digital spaces and promote accountability for technology-facilitated abuse.[1]
- APC drafted a collective call to action to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence in late 2024 and disseminated this during 2025.
- APC continued to roll out the APC-developed framework for gender-responsive cybersecurity policy we reported on in 2024 with sections on norms, standards and guidelines: This three-part framework seeks to support policy makers and civil society organisations by providing practical guidance for developing gender-responsive cybersecurity policies, laws and strategies.

Action line C6: Enabling environment

APC worked actively on policy development in several countries, particularly to ensure enabling policy and regulation in the areas of spectrum allocation and infrastructure development. Our work on enabling policy and regulation for community-centered connectivity is also relevant to this action line. So is AfriSIG.

Action line C7: ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life

In this action line which covers a range of applications, APC focused on **"e-environment"**:

- APC member in Cameroon, PROTEGE QV, working with the Cameroonian ministry in charge of ICT, drafted a memorandum of understanding on e-waste management.
- APC member in Colombia, Colnodo, launched the "Transformative Environmental Alert Systems: Improving Sensor Design and Community Involvement" project to empower local communities to build and use their own environmental monitoring kits. By involving communities in the design process, the initiative turns technology into a tool for environmental stewardship and self-determination, allowing them to collect data on air, water, and noise quality to shape their own future.

Action line C9: Media

- Safety of journalists and gendered disinformation: APC prioritised the safety of women journalists, working with UNESCO and others. Specifically it has conducted research on gendered disinformation, a manifestation of harmful content which disproportionately

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1   https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/voices-digital-spaces-technology-related-violence-against-women

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affects women in the media in partnership with the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, Irene Khan. Regional consultations and a series of seminars and workshops were organised to discuss freedom of expression and gender justice, with a focus on the different types of censorship, threats and attacks faced by women and gender non-conforming individuals in their interactions with technology.

Action line C10: Ethical dimensions of the Information Society

APC's considers human rights to be at the heart of this Action Line. APC activities in the past year focused on digitally mediated threats to the expression of human rights, gender justice and digitally facilitated violence against women, girls and people of diverse genders and sexualities.
- APC released a joint statement on WSIS and human rights together with the Global Digital Rights Coalition for WSIS and the Global Digital Justice Forum in October 2025.
- APC's Women's Rights Programme participated in the March meeting on the Convention on the Status of Women (CSW69: "Beijing+30 Emerging issues and future directions for gender equality and women's rights'") and was part of the Expert Group Meeting convened by UN Women. We presented a paper on "Charting the Future, Revisiting Beijing's Commitments in the Digital Era" and a statement on artificial intelligence to advance gender equality.
- APC continued to advocate for gender to be at the heart of the implementation of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and disseminated the principles developed in 2023 and 2024: Women's rights and choices in a digital world: Why we need a feminist GDC.
- Launch of the TFGBV Shared Research Agenda together with the Global Partnership to End Online Abuse and Harassment, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), and UN Women.
- APC member in the United States and Mexico, May First, launched a research initiative in May 2025 to learn how to reduce the dependence of civil society organisations on Google. It is called "Cutting the cord: Understanding our dependence on surveillance capitalism". The goal is a more strategic approach to reducing civil society dependence on corporate technology and help transition to safer and more sustainable technology.

Part Two: A brief (1 page) analytical overview of trends and experiences in implementation:

Progress
- Recognition by policy makers and other stakeholders of the urgency of addressing and providing responses to gendered disinformation and technology facilitated gender-based violence.
- Recognition of the effectiveness and future potential of community-centred connectivity initiatives as a means to achieve meaningful access and practical steps by regulators to support them through enabling licensing and regulation.
- Deeper and more concrete understanding of what is needed to ensure the longer term sustainability of community-centred connectivity initiatives.
- Broad-based recognition of the ongoing validity of the WSIS vision and framework.
- Affirmation of APC and others in civil society's advocacy for a focus on financing in the WSIS+20 outcome document.

Obstacles encountered
- Widespread lack of awareness of the urgency and extent of lack of access to meaningful connectivity. There is a widespread assumption that the connectivity problem has been solved, and that it is only in remote rural areas that people still do not have access.

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Affordability and availability is simply not what it should be. Unless there is greater recognition of the problem nothing will change. Quoting averages such as one included in the WSIS+20 draft outcome document that states that more than 90% of the world's population lives in areas with LTE coverage is dangerously misleading when Africa's internet penetration is still below 40%.

- Greater concentration of power and control in the hands of a few global operators – in both the telecommunications and internet sectors and a retreat from concern for human rights and development by some of these companies.
- Geopolitical tensions in multilateral processes.
- The withdrawal of funds which has affected many of APC's partners and members who had, particularly for gender justice and digital rights worked, received funds from US government sources.
- Uncertainty on how implementation of the Global Digital Compact relates to the WSIS process, e.g. through the creation of a new dialogue on AI when the existing WSIS platforms such as the IGF, the WSIS Forum and the ITU's AI for Good events already deal with this topic.
- Narratives around global governance of artificial intelligence and the governance of data that seem to be de-linked from the WSIS ICT for development discourse.
- A context of intensification of global distress, violence and escalation of conflicts in Palestine, Sudan, Ecuador, Argentina, Lebanon and other countries in all regions.

Part Three: A brief description of innovative initiatives and future actions

(a) Innovative policies, programmes and projects which have been undertaken by APC and its members to implement the outcomes

Several of the activities described above are innovative. But here are a few we want to highlight:

- In 2025 APC developed The Community Network Builder, an application that helps estimate and understand the cost of building and operating a community network anywhere in the world. A variety of network types, can be modeled including mobile or Wi-Fi networks, fixed wireless, fibre-to-the- home, public access facilities, or any combination of these. The application guides users in describing terrain and vegetation conditions that may impact network deployment, particularly for radio frequency networks. After specifying the population and area to be covered, users can design the network step by step, and the application provides helpful hints throughout this process, including suggested costs for network elements and traffic, which can easily be adjusted. The Community Network Builder Application was commissioned by APC to Systems Knowledge Concepts (SKC) and Telco2 and developed with the support of the Internet Society (ISOC), the Asia Pacific Network Information Centre (APNIC) Foundation, Hello World and the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC).
- Implementation of the courses for ICT network managers in indigenous and rural communities. APC developed with the ITU in LAC and adaptation and translation of these course for African participants. The African programme was launched mid-2025. What was innovative is how APC and its partners approached adapting the material developed originally for LAC for an African audience. It involved a detailed assessment of what parts of the curriculum needed to change and research into Africa-specific contexts and demographics.
- AfriSIG: The African School on Internet Governance, now in its 13th year once again proved that its innovative approach to building African leadership and capacity in internet and digital governance is extremely effective. By creating a safe but challenging space for

people from different stakeholder groups with often conflicting perspectives to engage with one another openly and at the same time giving them a concrete collaborative task to perform, they build a deeper understanding of why they see and experience the digital policy world differently. Selecting topical opportunities for them to contribute to, such as the CSTD Working Group on Data Governance, they have the added sense of achievement of being part of a global process. By co-locating AfriSIG with the African IGF they are able to go straight from a learning and leadership development experience into policy discussions with increased insight and confidence.

(b) Future actions or initiatives

- APC aims to launch a fund and/or financing mechanisms for community centred connectivity initiatives in the next two years.
- AfriSIG 2026 will focus on the links between AI governance and internet governance and for its practicum topic assess and make recommendations on effective multistakeholder implementation of the African AI Strategy.
- APC's LocNet programme will continue implement its strategy to empower national networks of community-centred internet service providers in its priority countries in Asia, Africa and LAC so that they are able to influence policy and work collaboratively with regulators, and gain the skills resources they need to become sustainable while providing meaningful services to their communities.
- If the WSIS+20 outcome includes a working group on financing WSIS implementation APC hopes to participate actively.