

COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years

Submission by

Secretariat of the Internet Governance Forum

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the CSTD secretariat that will inform the substantive discussion at the CSTD on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years during its 28th annual session in April 2025, in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution E/RES/2023/3, to the CSTD to conduct such substantive discussions and to report thereon, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly.

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United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development
Twenty years in the implementation of outcomes of the World Summit on the
Information Society (WSIS)

WSIS+20 Reporting Template

Name of organization: United Nations Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Secretariat

Name of respondent: For Chengetai Masango

Role of respondent: Head of Office

Date of response: 15 November 2024

I. What is your organisation's formal role and responsibilities concerning WSIS implementation?

a. Mandates of your organization relevant to the WSIS implementation

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is a direct outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), with its mandate originating from the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. It was convened by the UN Secretary-General in 2006.

The IGF's primary responsibility is to facilitate multistakeholder dialogue on public policy issues related to the governance of the Internet. This mandate supports the implementation of WSIS action lines by creating a platform for dialogue, capacity building, supporting stakeholder engagement and promoting cooperation on matters related to the governance of digital technologies.

b. Brief History of your organization's contribution to the World Summit on the information Society (WSIS)

Since its inception, the IGF has played a crucial role in fostering open and inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders, including governments, private sector, civil society, technical community and intergovernmental organizations, on Internet governance issues; fostering stakeholder engagement and developing digital capacity for stakeholders in need, supporting in this way the implementation of all WSIS action lines. Particularly, its work has been contributing to: C1: The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in promoting ICTs for development; C4: Capacity building; and C11: International and regional cooperation.

Following the 2012 report by the CSTD Working Group on Improvements to the IGF, the IGF has implemented numerous recommendations, which have been integral to its

progress. These include enhancing its tangible outcomes, visibility, and working modalities, as well as improving funding mechanisms and capacity-building efforts.

In addition to this, the IGF's role has expanded through the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and the "Our Common Agenda" report, which emphasize the importance of a strengthened IGF to address global digital challenges.

Since 2006, on annual basis, several thousands of stakeholders from all regions and almost all countries have taken active participation in the IGF. Within each IGF cycle, various substantive outputs on concrete digital policy topics have been produced through multistakeholder, bottom up, open and inclusive exchanges of practices. Also, to date, 174 IGF initiatives at national and regional levels, are organized by multistakeholder communities around the world, applying the IGF model and its principles on local and regional levels.

As one of the major outcomes of WSIS, the IGF annually reports to the CSTD on its achievements and ways it supports the implementation of all the agreed action lines.

Looking ahead to the WSIS+20 Review and the possibility of its extension in 2025, the IGF is both recommitted to its mandate – which it has fulfilled and, in many respects, surpassed, in tandem with the evolution of digital issues – and recommitted to the continuous progress suggested by the above processes.

c. Implementation processes and initiatives within your organization and/or in partnership with other organizations

The IGF implements its WSIS-related responsibilities by focusing on several key initiatives and processes. This includes its continued efforts to improve the visibility and outcomes of the annual IGF meetings, which from year-to-year increases participation both in quality and quantity. As mandated, the Forum is also committed to capacity building and enhancing multistakeholder participation. In this mission, the IGF is actively working to strengthen its links with other Internet governance-related entities, particularly through collaboration and partnerships. For example, some of the most recent ones include creating conditions for stakeholder engagement, both at individual and organizational levels through the IGF intersessional policy work, capacity-building efforts, and collaborations through its network of 174 national,

regional and youth IGF initiatives (NRIs). These partnerships span government agencies, regional Internet registries, academic institutions, and key policy initiatives like NetMundial, as well as major political entities, such as the G7, African Union Commission, and European Commission, where IGF regularly participates in the High-level Group on Internet Governance. Collaboration within the UN System has also grown, with a wider range of agencies – including OHCHR, UNESCO, UNDP, UNIDIR, UNICRI, UNCTAD, UNOCT, UNICEF, UN Women, UN University, and regional UN commissions – all actively engaging in IGF's intersessional consultations and annual meetings. The IGF's involvement extends to the GDC Core Group and Cyber Hub, and through WSIS and GDC processes, it maintains close coordination with the ITU, UNCTAD, and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology (OSET), etc. At local levels, the IGF Secretariat works closely with schools on Internet governance, contributing to capacity development through their programmes, as well as through the network of 174 national, regional and youth IGF initiatives, where it actively participates in substantive discussions upon invitation and continuously supports the establishment and functioning of these IGF-like processes.

II. What have been your organization's main contributions to the direct implementation of the WSIS outcomes and related areas of digital development since the Summit, particularly since 2015?

a. WSIS Action Lines (as lead, co-facilitator or supporting participant)

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) has actively contributed to several WSIS Action Lines since 2015, primarily acting as a platform for multistakeholder discussions on Internet governance issues. Specifically, the IGF has focused on:

- C1: The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development

The IGF facilitates dialogue among all stakeholders, including governments, private sector, civil society, technical community, and international and intergovernmental organizations, to promote the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for socio-economic development. This is done through gathering on average 6,000 stakeholders at its annual IGF meeting, to engaging hundreds of stakeholders through its intersessional work, and supporting the work of now 174 national, regional and youth IGFs, that collectively enable every year over 10,000 stakeholders to discuss

issues of local priority within their IGF-like frameworks. Through these activities, inclusive forums and sessions, the IGF supports the creation of informed policies that harness ICTs to drive sustainable development.

- C4: Capacity building

The IGF has implemented extensive capacity-building initiatives aimed at empowering stakeholders, particularly from developing countries, to effectively participate in Internet governance discussions. This includes support for National, Regional, and Youth IGFs (NRIs), capacity development workshops, and financial assistance for participants from least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), and small island developing states (SIDS). For example, just in 2023, the IGF Secretariat and the Host Country, Japan, supported 125 stakeholders from developing countries to participate in the annual meeting. Over 20 national, regional and youth IGFs received grants to support the implementation of their annual meetings and setting up remote hubs to facilitate organized participation in the IGF and long-term stakeholder engagement. Dozens of capacity development workshops were organized with and for communities in need, particularly focusing on developing countries' stakeholder engagement, and targeted stakeholder support, such as youth and legislators, but also women, SMEs etc. Its intersessional work, as every year, is set to respond to the demands of the community. In 2023, platforms were established through policy networks and best practice forums to support stakeholder exchanges on matters related to AI, Internet fragmentation, cybersecurity and meaningful access, in addition to over 30 other issues facilitated by the IGF Dynamic Coalitions.

- C11: International and regional cooperation

Through collaboration among diverse stakeholders and partnerships with other Internet governance bodies, the IGF strengthens both international and regional cooperation. Initiatives like the IGF Leadership Panel and partnerships with UN agencies such as ITU and UNCTAD highlight IGF's commitment to coordinated global digital governance. As indicated above, this cooperation spans a wide array of participants, including government bodies, regional Internet registries, academic institutions, and major policy forums like NetMundial, along with influential political organizations like the G7, African Union Commission, and European Commission, where IGF regularly engages in the High-level Group on Internet Governance. Collaboration within the UN System has also expanded, encompassing agencies such as OHCHR, UNESCO, UNDP, UNIDIR, UNICRI, UNCTAD, UNOCT, UNICEF, UN Women, UN University, and regional UN commissions, of which are involved in IGF's annual meeting and/or intersessional consultative work. The IGF's role extends further,

engaging with the GDC Core Group and Cyber Hub, and maintaining close coordination through the WSIS and GDC processes with ITU, UNCTAD, and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology (OSET).

At the local level, the IGF Secretariat collaborates closely with Internet governance schools to enhance capacity-building initiatives and actively supports the network of 174 national, regional, and youth IGF initiatives. The Secretariat participates in these forums upon invitation and provides ongoing support within its capacity for the development and operation of these IGF-like processes.

b. WSIS-related projects

Since 2015, the IGF has spearheaded and supported numerous projects aligned with WSIS outcomes, including expanding the network of NRIs, growing from 43 recognized initiatives in 2015 to 174 by November 2024. These NRIs operate independently while adhering to IGF's core principles, contributing to awareness raising, stakeholder engagement, and digital public policy advancement, as well as supporting the IGF's intersessional activities, and organizing joint sessions at annual IGFs.

It also has been supporting now over 30 Dynamic Coalitions, as multistakeholder networks for community exchanges of practices, on particular digital policy issues such as blockchain, access, digital economy, gender and human rights, AI etc.

Also, the IGF has established platforms for year-round community consultations and exchanges of practices, through Policy Networks on critical issues such as Environment and Sustainability, Internet Fragmentation, Meaningful Access, and Artificial Intelligence, as well as Best Practice Forums (BPFs) on topics like Gender and Digital Rights, IXPs, IPv6, Cybersecurity, Local Content etc.

The introduction and expansion of dedicated Youth and Parliamentary Tracks have enabled greater participation of young people and legislators in IGF processes, ensuring diverse perspectives are integrated into digital governance discussions.

The two critical IGF structures, the Leadership Panel and the MAG, have been working on enhancing the IGF's strategic direction, visibility, and fundraising capabilities directly supporting and advocating for the WSIS vision and framework.

All IGF structures actively contribute to WSIS-related activities, including periodic reviews of WSIS action lines, discussions at the CSTD, participation in the WSIS Forum, and similar engagements.

c. Indicators used to measure the impact of ICT in the achievement of the SDGs in your organization's area of work

The IGF employs several indicators to assess the impact of ICT on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within its scope of work. These include participation metrics:

- All IGF sessions at the annual IGF meeting, are required to make linkages with the relevant SDGs both in the phase of session proposal submission and when reporting on the outputs;
- Number of delegates and countries represented at annual IGF meetings to foster inclusion and reach;
- Growth in the number of NRIs and their active contributions to intersessional activities;
- Increased participation of underrepresented groups, including youth and stakeholders from LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDs;
- High-level participation of decision-makers, including involvement of ministers, members of parliaments, and senior government officials in IGF sessions;
- Number of capacity-building initiatives such as workshops conducted and beneficiaries;
- Financial support provided to participants from developing regions to attend in-person IGF meetings, carefully selected so that the composition is reflective of regional, country, stakeholder and gender balance, among other factors;
- Tangible outcomes from the intersession work that specifically looks at the ways their focus matter contributes to sustainability;

All IGF-produced outputs, including those from the annual meeting and intersessional work that address the implications of digital technologies on sustainability, are widely disseminated to policy-making and advisory forums at local and global levels. This ensures that these insights inform key processes and create meaningful impact.

d. What assessment has your organization made of its engagement in WSIS-related work and digital development in its areas of responsibility?

The IGF has conducted comprehensive assessments of its engagement in WSIS-related work and digital development, highlighting significant progress and areas for continuous improvement, as mentioned below. These are regularly monitored and annually reported to the community in the IGF's Progress Report.

The IGF has successfully increased its visibility and engagement with high-level stakeholders. For example, the 2023 IGF in Kyoto opened with the active participation of Japan's prime minister and saw the largest-ever physical gathering, reflecting the Forum's growing prominence and influence in global digital policy discussions.

By adhering to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) Working Group on Improvements to the IGF's recommendations, the IGF has made substantial advancements in its working modalities, funding mechanisms, and capacity-building efforts. This has resulted in more tangible outcomes and greater overall visibility.

It has also established robust partnerships with various UN agencies and Internet governance entities, enhancing coordinated efforts towards digital transformation and governance.

The IGF's commitment to inclusivity is evident in its expanded support for underrepresented groups, the growth of NRIs, and the successful integration of youth and parliamentary tracks. These efforts have ensured a more diverse and representative multistakeholder dialogue.

Aligning its agenda with the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and the Global Digital Compact, the IGF has remained responsive to evolving digital issues such as Artificial Intelligence, cybersecurity, Internet fragmentation etc. This adaptability underscores the IGF's role as a dynamic platform for addressing contemporary digital challenges. Furthermore, the Forum has demonstrated a strong commitment to ongoing improvement and strategic positioning within the broader UN digital policy landscape.

Overall, the IGF's engagement in WSIS-related work has been marked by significant achievements in fostering multistakeholder dialogue, enhancing capacity and participation, and influencing global digital policy. The Forum remains dedicated to advancing the principles and outcomes of WSIS, ensuring that the Internet remains a tool for inclusive and sustainable development.

III. What does your organization see as the main achievements, problems and emerging issues arising from WSIS and from digital development in its areas of responsibility since the Summit, particularly since 2015?

a. What have been the main achievements of WSIS and digital development?

Since the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), one of the key achievements has been the creation and continuous evolution of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) itself, which has provided a platform for inclusive, bottom-up, open, multistakeholder dialogue on Internet governance issues. This WSIS- vision has translated into the successful promotion worldwide of the multistakeholder approach to Internet governance, ensuring dialogue and equal participation from all stakeholders under the auspices of the UN. This model has fostered open and transparent discussions on pressing digital issues, ranging from data privacy to Internet access, ensuring that multistakeholder cooperation leads to good governance of digital technologies.

Through the IGF experience and work, we see that WSIS's vision has made notable strides in empowering stakeholders, particularly from the Global South, by developing capacity. For example, the continuous growth of National, Regional, and Youth IGFs (NRIs), which now exceed 170 globally, has increased local and regional involvement in global digital policy processes. These initiatives have amplified voices from underrepresented communities and facilitated their inclusion in global digital governance dialogues.

As digital technologies are rapidly developing and impacting human rights and economies, WSIS mechanisms, such as the IGF, have enabled communities to quickly react to these changes by addressing emerging digital issues leading to their governance.

Finally, an evolved WSIS framework has enabled leveraging digital technologies to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

b. What problems, obstacles and constraints have been encountered?

Despite these achievements, several obstacles and constraints have been encountered, limiting the full realization of WSIS outcomes and digital development

goals. From the IGF perspective, one persistent challenge is securing adequate and sustainable funding for the Forum's activities.

Another layer of challenges is achieving full inclusivity. Barriers such as the digital divide, financial limitations, and lack of technical capacity continue to hinder equal participation in IGF processes, particularly for stakeholders from least-developed countries and marginalized communities.

There are also challenges related to translating discussions into tangible policy outcomes at local levels. There have been calls for the IGF to produce more actionable outputs and improve the follow-up and implementation of its recommendations at national and regional levels. This has been addressed through recent efforts to strengthen the IGF's working modalities. Although much progress has been achieved, this remains an ongoing issue.

c. What new opportunities and challenges have emerged over the years since WSIS which need to be addressed?

Since the original WSIS, new opportunities and challenges have emerged, underscoring the need for a renewed approach. The upcoming WSIS+20 review and the recently adopted Global Digital Compact offer a chance for WSIS—and by extension, the IGF, one of its key outcomes—to play a more proactive and structured role in global digital governance. As a neutral, people-centered, multistakeholder platform, the IGF is well-positioned to provide expertise, foster dialogue, and support the implementation of the GDC's goals.

Twenty years after the first WSIS, awareness of the multistakeholder model for digital governance has grown, and digital technologies are now deeply embedded in everyday life. This evolution enables WSIS+20 to reorient its mechanisms toward more impactful implementation of its objectives. Additionally, there are now greater resources and tools available to support this mission. For example, innovation in digital policy discourse brings new opportunities, as the rise of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and quantum computing presents an opportunity for the WSIS and IGF to lead discussions on their governance.

Regarding the challenges, the increasing threat of Internet fragmentation, with local levels implementing potentially divergent regulatory frameworks for the Internet and

digital services, challenges the vision of a globally interconnected Internet. There is a need to continuously facilitate discussions and propose solutions to maintain an open and unified digital space.

The rapid development of AI technologies, particularly generative AI, has raised new governance challenges related to ethics, accountability, and the potential for societal harm. The WSIS mechanism must continue to evolve its focus on AI governance, ensuring that global, inclusive discussions on AI development are grounded in principles of human rights, transparency, and fairness.

Finally, there are still significant disparities in digital access, especially in developing countries. It is imperative for the WSIS mechanism to continue to focus on meaningful access and capacity building to address these inequalities. Equally important is security and safety. Cybersecurity remains a growing concern as cyber threats become more sophisticated and widespread. This domain must be addressed in a multistakeholder setting, for example through the IGF, to support and ensure protection of critical infrastructure and the safeguarding of human rights online.

IV. Lessons learned in the implementation of the Summit outcomes in your organisation's specific areas of responsibility

One of the key lessons from the IGF work is the value of the multistakeholder model in fostering inclusive dialogue on complex digital governance issues. Bringing together all stakeholders on an equal footing has allowed for diverse perspectives and collaborative problem-solving. The model further enables an agile but flexible and adaptable approach to addressing the rapidly evolving nature of the digital landscape. As new issues like AI, cybersecurity, and digital fragmentation emerge, the WSIS mechanisms must continuously evolve to stay relevant.

Another important lesson learnt is that capacity developing is key to good digital governance. Effective participation in digital governance discussions requires adequate capacity, particularly for stakeholders from developing countries. This is not only about providing financial resources but also about empowering stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully.

Without sustainable funding, digital governance remains challenged on various fronts. It is important to note that the IGF has functioned for almost two decades on the basis

of voluntary contributions from our donors. Ensuring a more reliable and diversified funding base remains essential for the long-term sustainability of the Forum and its ability to deliver on its mandate.

Also, we need to continue exploring ways in which discussions translate to actions and impact public digital policy at all levels.

Finally, the importance of enhanced collaboration with other local and global Internet governance initiatives is critical. We believe in the UN systemwide approach and close cooperation with stakeholders of all backgrounds at local, regional and global levels for good digital governance.

V. Observations or recommendations concerning the future of WSIS and digital development, taking into account the outcomes of the Summit of the Future in September 2024

The WSIS framework has proven to be a key platform for advancing global discussions on digital development. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF), as a direct outcome of WSIS, continues to play an essential role in fostering multistakeholder dialogue and addressing emerging challenges in digital governance. However, as digital technologies evolve rapidly, WSIS must adapt to remain relevant in shaping the future of the digital economy and digital rights.

The Summit of the Future in 2024 reaffirmed the importance of a Global Digital Compact (GDC) and good values. This supports and complements the robust WSIS mechanisms and good principles it has been implementing for close to two decades now. The WSIS+20 can play a crucial role in ways to improve approaches to global digital governance, reflecting also on supporting the implementation of the GDC.

VI. Please identify publications, reports and other documents by your organisation which you consider can contribute to the work of the review.

- Annual IGF Reports to CSTD <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/cstd-reports-1>
- Annual IGF Progress Reports <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-trust-fund>

- Annual IGF Messages and output reports, including the intersessional work
<https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-annual-meetings-proceedings>
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Useful reference links:

Geneva and Tunis outcome documents from WSIS -

<https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/outcome/booklet/index.html>

The General Assembly's ten-year review report -

<https://publicadministration.un.org/wsis10/Portals/5/N1543842.pdf>

The CSTD ten-year review - https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2015d3_en.pdf

Contributions should be submitted by 15 November 2024 to the CSTD Secretariat at cstd-wsis20@unctad.org. They will be made available on the CSTD website for consideration by the Commission unless contributors specifically request that their submissions should not be published.
