
Session Outcome Document

Defending Our Voice: Global South Participation in Digital Governance

Derechos Digitales

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Session page link: <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2025/Agenda/Session/309>

Key Issues discussed: Looking Beyond 2025:

- **Historically marginalized groups from the Global South continue to face significant barriers to meaningful participation in digital governance spaces.** While challenges such as visa restrictions and financial constraints persist, key obstacles like the absence of follow-up mechanisms for participation and silence procedures also remain, which sideline these groups' voices. This concern is heightened by ongoing geopolitical shifts and the risks faced by human rights defenders in participating in discussions increasingly centralized in New York.
- **It is crucial to contextualize the WSIS+20 process into Global South communities' diverse lived realities,** actively including their voices to acknowledge their needs and how they navigate the absence of comprehensive digital policies.
- **Achieving truly plural and inclusive participation in digital governance requires moving beyond mere presence in fora.** WSIS multi-stakeholder model is an opportunity to actively identify which communities and groups must be included, and guaranteeing their meaningful participation in these events to avoid worsening structural inequalities.
- **Participation is a human right that should be easily and safely exercised by all.** However, the current geopolitical climate shows a concerning pull back in human rights protections, particularly regarding gender issues. Daily reports from Global South CSOs and human rights defenders reveal growing risks faced by individuals and communities, clear evidence of systematically shrinking civic spaces. This alarming trend exacerbates barriers to meaningful participation.
- **The participation of wealthy nations and powerful corporations remains dominant in digital governance fora,** particularly in those establishing technical standards for Information and Communication Technologies. Within these spaces, meaningful civil society participation is crucial to ensure human rights' perspectives and underrepresented voices are central to the development of technical standards
- **The WSIS+20 process plays a crucial role in establishing meaningful participation through its multi-stakeholder model, as do global, regional and national Internet Governance Forum (IGF).** These governance spaces provide vital opportunities to integrate human rights perspectives into technical discussions while influencing policy development at state levels.
- **Specific mechanisms are available to operationalize inclusive multistakeholder participation.** The WSIS+20 process should actively incorporate and explicitly reference the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines developed through the NETmundial+10 initiative as a framework for implementation.

- **Effective coordination of digital governance spaces is essential.** While multiple parallel fora addressing the same issues can help cover diverse topics, they risk producing conflicting outcomes. Strategic alignment is needed to prevent forum duplication and ensure these spaces remain effective and impactful.

Tangible Outcomes of the session:

- Collective identification of barriers to meaningful participation for Global South independent CSOs in digital governance arenas.
- Development of actionable strategies to overcome barriers to meaningful participation for Global South civil society in international digital governance, like the explicit mention and inclusion of São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines within WSIS+20 process.
- Identification of concrete strategies to ensure the WSIS+20 review and update process actively incorporates historically marginalized groups into digital governance frameworks; for example, keeping the mandate of IGF, especially at national and regional levels.
- Set of recommendations to advance towards inclusive governance processes ensuring historically marginalized groups have a significant voice in decisions affecting their rights in digital environments. This includes explicit recognition of groups such as LGBTQIA+, indigenous communities, farmers.

Key Recommendations and Forward-Looking Action Plan for the WSIS+20 Review and Beyond:

- **Big Tech companies must be held accountable for human rights violations throughout their value chains deployment, with particular attention to operations in the Global South.** To do so, it is key to include the UN guiding principles on business and human rights as well as to move beyond treating Global South citizens as mere tech consumers by ensuring their meaningful participation in digital governance arenas; prioritize the inclusion of disproportionately affected groups - including women and girls, LGBTQIA+ communities, Indigenous peoples, and smallholder farmers - in accountability mechanisms; and establish transparent monitoring systems to identify and address violations at all operational levels.
- **Recognize and implement the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines within WSIS process** to enable sub-national, national, regional, and global communities to: build trust, enhance with effective multistakeholder collaboration mechanisms, and critically assess processes that claim to be multistakeholder in name only. NETmundial+10 experience provided concrete guidelines for ensuring meaningful community participation and safeguarding diversity in digital governance processes.
- **Guarantee Global South civil society meaningful participation in digital governance agenda-setting.** Ensuring that CSOs can actively shape discussion frameworks is critical to inform decision-making including the voices of historically marginalized groups. This requires establishing sustainable participation beyond token consultation. In this regard, WSIS review process must prioritize making the IGF mandate permanent, with particular emphasis on strengthening IGF at national and regional levels.
- **WSIS multistakeholder model needs to keep bringing Global South independent CSOs to the table,** not only during the high-level event, but through the whole process. São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines outline concrete examples to do so. In the same vein, it is crucial to guarantee transparent, timely information about decision-making processes.

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- **The incorporation of an agreed human rights language in digital governance frameworks remains critical.** The WSIS+20 Elements Paper currently uses weak terminology, the Global Digital Compact (GDC) recognized stand-alone principles on human rights and gender that should be included. We must identify and adopt best practices from existing processes to strengthen WSIS review and update process.