World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum Input to the United Nations High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2020

General Introduction

About WSIS

The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)** in two phases. The first phase took place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and the second phase took place in Tunis, from 16 to 18 November 2005. The goal of WSIS is to achieve a common vision, desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information.

Through the Summit's first phase in 2003, a framework for an inclusive Information Society was created as set out in Geneva Plan of Action[1]. Since 2015, the WSIS Process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are being aligned by stakeholders to integrate ICTs into their approaches in implementing the activities/initiatives to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

About WSIS Forum

The WSIS Forum represents the world's largest annual gathering of the 'ICT for development' community. The Forum is co-organized by ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD, in close collaboration with all WSIS Action Line Facilitators/co-facilitators. The WSIS Forum has proven to be an efficient medium for coordination of multistakeholder implementation activities, information exchange, creation of knowledge, sharing of best practices and continues to provide assistance in developing multistakeholder and public/private partnerships to advance development goals.

The WSIS Forum 2020 (WSIS+15) is scheduled to be organized from 31 August to 4 September 2020 under the theme of "*Fostering digital transformation and global partnerships: WSIS Action Lines for achieving SDGs*" and will serve as a platform to track the achievements of WSIS Action Lines in collaboration with the UN Agencies involved and provide information and analyses on the implementation of WSIS Action Lines since 2005. (www.wsis.org/forum)

1. **Key policies and measures to ensure "accelerated action and transformative pathways" for realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development**

In line with Resolution A/70/1 and Resolution A/70/125, the WSIS Process implementation activities have been aligned with the 2020 Agenda for Sustainable Development, thereby highlighting the direct linkages between WSIS Action Lines and SDGs.

The vital role of ICTs as a catalyst for development is specifically recognized in the 2030 Agenda, which acknowledges that "the spread of information and communication technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress and to develop knowledge societies, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine and energy". The power of ICTs has transformed and improved people's lives worldwide. The multistakeholder outcomes derived from the WSIS Forum demonstrated how ICTs can foster creativity and innovation to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals. After ten years of engagement between all WSIS

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[1] The Plan of Action sets forth a clear commitment to translate these principles into practice and to meet concrete and tangible targets with the aim of promoting sustainable development. https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/promotional/brochure-dop-poa.pdf

stakeholders, WSIS Forum remains the premier global platform for multistakeholder collaboration to make ICTs a critical driver of global development.

The UNGA overall review on the implementation of WSIS resulted in a UNGA Resolution A/70/125 that was adopted on 16 December 2015. The resolution provides guidance on the implementation of the WSIS Outcomes till 2025. In particular, it calls for close alignment between the WSIS process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (para.5) and requests all stakeholders to integrate ICTs into their approaches to implementing the Goals, and request UN entities facilitating WSIS Action Lines to review their reporting and work plans to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda (para.12).

The effective implementation of the WSIS Action Lines can help accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. To that end, the WSIS-SDG Matrix[2], developed by the UN Action line Facilitators, clearly shows the linkage between each Action line and the 17 SDGs and provides rationale for each. Since 2015, the agenda and outcomes of the annual WSIS Forum show clear linkages between the WSIS Action Lines and SDGs. WSIS Forum outcomes have been officially submitted to the HLPF every year, including a document that is produced by the WSIS Action Line Facilitators on the theme of the HLPF annually.

ICTs empower billions of individuals around the world with wide ranging applications cutting across sectoral boundaries in agricultural productivity; population, health and education; transportation; industry, trade and finance; climate change and protection of our environment; as well as for the prevention and management of disasters, among many others.While progress has been made towards achieving SDGs, greater efforts are needed to deliver the Goals by 2030. WSIS Forum is the only event of its kind where the agenda and progamme are built in an open and inclusive process. The Forum has captured insights, good practices and lessons learned on implementing SDGs, as well as raised key priorities for action.

The WSIS Forum is a fast-growing platform that provides a fully multistakeholder vision and identifies emerging trends while providing recommendation on the future of the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines. Mirroring the theme of the HLPF 2020, the WSIS Forum 2020 will focus to enhance understanding of fostering digital transformation and to highlight the importance of global partnerships with the WSIS Action Lines as a means to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.

a. Critical gaps in implementing the 2030 Agenda within the area of responsibility of the intergovernmental body (bearing in mind interrelations with other goals and targets)

The agenda and program of WSIS Forum are designed in collaboration with the multistakeholder community based on official submissions received during the Open Consultation Process. This process actively engages governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, the technical community and intergovernmental organizations in the preparatory process to ensure broad ownership and further improvements of the Forum. The Open Consultation Process for the WSIS Forum also included a collection of inputs from regional and national WSIS related events.

The following highlighted some challenges that emerged through submissions and discussions over the course of the Open Consultation Process and the Forum in implementing the 2030 Agenda:

Digital Divide
- Building on the guiding principle of the SDGs of "leaving no one behind", there is a need to bridge the digital divide in access to and usage of ICTs. Notable types include digital gender divide and digital generation divide. Connecting the unconnected remains a priority to bridge the digital divide. The prospects for widespread use of the Internet remain poor, particularly for Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Nearly 3.6 billion people remain unconnected from the Internet and from the digital products and services that could dramatically improve their lives. Affordable access to ICTs, confidence and security in use of ICTs, capacity building and collaborative ICT policy and regulatory approaches for digital transformation are essential for accelerated action to achieve the SDGs.

Accessibility and Inclusion

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[2] See https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/

- Increasing access to information and knowledge is critical to implement the 2030 Agenda. Inclusion and participation in all aspects of society is also essential, in particular, inclusion of youth, people with disabilities and special need, older persons, and women.

Digital skills
- For all stakeholders to benefit from ICTs, digital skills are required to adapt to rapid technological change.

Digital Cooperation
- Digital Cooperation is urgent to achieve universal access and connectivity, to improve security and trust in ICTs, and to increase capacity-building. It is also important to enable cross-sectoral cooperation in the field of ICTs for sustainable development. The need to create and maintain multilateral partnerships with different actors to strengthen the 2030 Agenda will provide a harmonious development fair and equitable for all at the national, regional and international levels.

b. Priority measures to:

i. accelerate action

- The Geneva Plan of Action provided a framework of 11 WSIS Action Lines that are the key principles for building an inclusive information society, the WSIS Forum is a Meeting of moderators and WSIS Action Line facilitators for accelerating development.

- ICTs have an important and valuable role to play in sustainable development. The implementation of WSIS Action Lines, which are organized thematically along areas of activity in which ICTs are harnessed for development, will therefore contribute directly to achieving the SDGs.

ii. ensure transformative pathways to realize the decade of action for achieving the 2030 Agenda

A wide array of topics of relevance to ICTs and development, including education, cybersecurity, access to information and communication technologies, infrastructure, digital divide, connectivity, older persons, youth, digital transformation, ethics, artificial intelligence, and many more has been put forward for the agenda of the WSIS Forum.

The concrete outcomes of WSIS Forum and its activities enable stakeholders to strengthen implementation of WSIS Action Lines and the alignment of the WSIS and SDG processes, and include among others:
- Special Tracks: The WSIS Forum 2020 will feature special tracks, including ICTs and Sports (to discover how technology is taking sports to new heights); ICTs and Youth, Extended Reality for SDG, ICT and Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities and Specific Needs, ICTs and Older Persons, ICTs and Gender Mainstreaming, and Innovation for SDG.
- UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) that remains committed and contributed to the alignment of the WSIS Action Lines and the SDGs.
- UN Regional Commissions committed to strengthen regional-level WSIS action through multistakeholder platforms and a series of regional face-to-face meetings.

2. Contribution of WSIS Forum to accelerated action and transformative pathways and realizing the decade of action and delivery for achieving the 2030 Agenda in the domain of ICTs for Development (including cooperation with ECOSOC and other intergovernmental bodies)

- *WSIS Action Lines and SDG Matrix*

The WSIS-SDG Matrix[3] developed by UN WSIS Action Line Facilitators serves as the mechanism to map, analyze and coordinate the implementation of WSIS Action Lines, and more specifically, ICTs as enablers and accelerators of the SDGs. This mapping exercise draws direct linkages of the WSIS Action Lines with the proposed SDGs to continue strengthening the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for sustainable development. Building on the Matrix, the Agenda and outcomes of the WSIS Forum are clearly linked to WSIS Action lines and SDGs highlighting the impact and importance of ICTs on sustainable development.

- *WSIS Stocktaking*
  WSIS Stocktaking[4] process is a resourceful and effective platform for the collection of ICT-related projects based on the WSIS Action Lines and SDGs, providing useful contributions to the sharing of best practices at the local national, regional and global level.

- *WSIS Prizes*
  WSIS Prizes[5] recognized remarkable efforts made by entities and organizations from around the globe based on their social, economic and environmental impact. The WSIS Prizes will honour 90 champions and 18 winners for their initiatives and projects that leverage the power of ICT. The WSIS Prize is awarded annually at the WSIS Forum.

- *Hackathon*
  The first Hackathon of the WSIS Forum was organized in 2017 and has continued since then with different themes that underline SDG goal. The theme of the Hackathon for 2020 is Smart Sustainable Cities. The hackathon will focus on hacking Smart and Sustainable solutions for cities around the globe. #Hack4SmartSustainableCities will identify and support innovative solutions to address cities challenges globally.

- *WSIS Photo Contest*
  Is a collection of photographs by stakeholders world-wide showcasing through photographs on how ICTs are playing an enabling role in achieving the SDGs. Please see WSIS Forum 2019 Winners and Finalists here: https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2019/PhotoSubmissions

- *Outcomes* of the WSIS Forum aligned to the WSIS Action lines and SDGs:
  The outcomes of the WSIS Forum are submitted to the HLPF on an annual basis, in addition the documents below are clearly aligned with the theme of the annual HLPF:

  1. WSIS Forum 2016: WSIS Action Lines Supporting Implementation of the SDGs (2016)

  2. WSIS Forum 2017: Implementation of WSIS Action Lines for Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing World

  3. WSIS Forum 2018: Implementation of WSIS Action Lines for Moving Towards Resilient and Sustainable Societies (HLPF 2018)

  4. WSIS Forum 2019: Report – WSIS Action Lines Contributing towards Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality

3. Selected recommendations for accelerating progress and moving on transformative pathways for realizing the decade of action, for possible use in drafting the HLPF declaration.

Key selected recommendations:

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[3] See https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/
[4] The WSIS Stocktaking process provides a register of activities – including projects, programs, training initiatives, conferences, websites, guidelines, toolkits, etc. – carried out by governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society and other entities. More information: https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/stocktaking/
[5] www.wsis.org/prizes

- WSIS Forum continues to be a key platform for multistakeholder networking and collaboration to develop inclusive and development-oriented information and knowledge societies. It provides an inclusive platform for stakeholders to address ICT for development issues through a structured and inclusive approach. It is recommended to strengthen the WSIS Forum as a key platform for discussing the role of ICTs as a means of implementation of the SDGs and targets.

- The outcomes of the WSIS Forum clearly highlight the linkages of the WSIS Action Lines with the SDGs and the annual theme of annual HLPF, it is recommended to be used as input in designing the annual HLPFs.

- WSIS Forum promotes and showcases projects and initiatives from the ground that are making social, economic and environmental impact through the annual WSIS Prizes contest and the WSIS Stocktaking Publications, it is recommended that these case studies are appropriately used for evidence based policy making highlighting the linkages between WSIS Action Lines and SDGs.

- It is recommended that the discussions and outcomes of the high-level segment of the WSIS Forum is used as an input for cross sectoral discussions by policy makers on strengthening the key role of ICTs in strategies and implementation.

- It is recommended that the convening power of the WSIS Forum, more so the effective collaboration with more than 30 UN Agencies, in particular the UN WSIS Action Line Facilitators to meet and report on their respective WSIS Implementation Activities and share plans for the future and serves as the mechanism to map, analyze and coordinate the implementation of ICTs as enablers and accelerators of the SDGs.

- Strengthening collaboration with the UN Regional Commissions, regional organizations/ initiatives WSIS Forum provides opportunities to build regional capacities on the WSIS and its alignment with 2030 Agenda

- Exploreing better interlinkages at the policy and implementation level between the WSIS Forum and the follow up process for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development, by the respective Secretariats.