



## WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS) FORUM CONTRIBUTION TO THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (HLPF) 2023

**2023 Theme: *Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.***

**SDGs under review:** The HLPF in 2023 will review the SDGs and will also discuss in depth Sustainable Development Goals: 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on affordable and clean energy, 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and 17 on partnerships for the goals.

### General Introduction

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 the Geneva Plan of Action<sup>1</sup>. Since 2015, the WSIS Process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are being aligned by stakeholders to integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs) into their approaches in implementing the activities/initiatives to support the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

In line with UN [Resolution A/70/1](#) and [Resolution A/70/125](#), ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD, in collaboration with more than 30 UN agencies, are continuously working towards strengthening the alignment of the WSIS Process implementation activities with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, thereby highlighting the direct linkages between WSIS Action Lines and SDGs.

#### **About the 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,

<sup>1</sup> 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>

creation of knowledge, sharing of best practices and foster partnerships to advance development goals.

The [WSIS Forum 2022](#) commenced with virtual sessions on 15 March and concluded with a final week held from 30 May to 3 June 2022, in Geneva, Switzerland, which brought together over 1,000 participants in person. More than 30,000 participants followed the Forum remotely since 15 March.

The [WSIS Forum 2023](#) took place from 13 to 17 March 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland, and continued with virtual sessions in April-May. The overall theme of the WSIS Forum 2023 is *WSIS Action Lines for building back better and accelerating the achievement of the SDGs* ([www.wsis.org/forum](http://www.wsis.org/forum)).

### **WSIS Action Lines and SDG Matrix**

The WSIS-SDG Matrix developed by 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. The Matrix draws direct linkages of the WSIS Action Lines with the SDGs to continue strengthening the impact of ICTs for sustainable development (<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/>).

## **A. Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs:**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an unparalleled dependence on information and communication technologies. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ICTs are recognized as a critical enabler of sustainable development, and post-pandemic will also help recovery and build resilience. The implementation of the WSIS outcomes will facilitate digital transformation and development, ultimately driving progress towards achieving the SDGs.

The WSIS Forum's impact has been significant in advancing sustainable development and building a more inclusive and equitable information and knowledge digital societies, making it a valuable platform for promoting the benefits of ICTs and addressing digital transformation challenges. Its interactive, inclusive, and comprehensive agenda and programme, which are shaped by multiple stakeholders in an open consultation process, have enabled meaningful discussion and digital cooperation towards common goals.

The main lesson learned from the WSIS and its Forum is that multistakeholder participation is essential to successfully build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society. There is a need to accelerate action on all levels and by all stakeholders to realize the vision and goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The [WSIS Stocktaking database](#) collects information on ICT for development activities and projects that are contributing to the implementation of WSIS Action Lines.

### **SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation**

Access to clean water and sanitation, especially in vulnerable communities is essential in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has disrupted the water supply chain in many

regions globally, leading to shortages and unavailability of clean water. The SDG 6 is closely linked to the WSIS Action Line C7 on E-environment and E-science. More than 400 projects related to E-environment have been submitted to the WSIS Stocktaking database.

#### SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

The WSIS Forum emphasizes the importance of technology in achieving affordable and clean energy. The WSIS Forum 2023 had a dedicated track on *ICTs and Clean Technologies for Climate Change* with the collaboration of various stakeholders. Virtual sessions explored the intersection of these two critical areas and identified solutions for mitigating the impact of climate change using technology.

#### SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

The WSIS Forum has highlighted the importance of investing in digital infrastructure and promoting innovation to support sustainable development. The use of 5G networks, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies has increased, enabling progress towards SDG 9.

#### SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

The pandemic has highlighted the need for resilient and sustainable cities and communities. The WSIS Forum addressed the topic of smart cities and urban innovation by engaging with Mayors of cities worldwide to share best practices and challenges of digital solutions for building people-centred resilient smart cities for better climate change adaptation and achieving the SDGs. At the WSIS Forum 2023, the Mayors presented concrete projects and local achievements on scalable and replicable best practices of digital solutions for climate change adaptation and energy transition.

#### SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of global partnerships in achieving the SDGs. As demonstrated by the progress made in the implementation of [Geneva Plan of Action](#), international cooperation and multistakeholder collaboration on the strategic use of ICTs to address a wide range of issues during the past decade has produced a wealth of knowledge, experience and expertise – resources which constitute a valuable foundation for future cooperation. There is a need for greater collaboration among governments and all relevant stakeholders to address different aspects of endeavoring to ensure confidence, security, privacy and personal data protection, safety and trust in the use of ICTs. International and regional cooperation and capacity building programs have been recognized as key elements in achieving this.

The WSIS community has seen significant growth in recent years and continues to contribute to the WSIS Forum, bringing in valuable insights, ideas, and initiatives that advance the WSIS Action Lines and the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **B. Three key areas where transformative actions for accelerated progress have been successful, and three key areas where support is most urgently needed, with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023:**

The WSIS process contributes towards the SDGs through various platforms, in particular the [WSIS Forum](#) and the [WSIS&SDG TalkX](#), where stakeholders have an opportunity to showcase examples of projects/initiatives that contribute to **SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 9, SDG 11, SDG 17:**

- Facilitating multistakeholder dialogues that pull together various expertise and insights on priorities, such as the *ICTs and Clean Technologies for Climate Change* special track. The sessions and discussions organised within this track aim to raise awareness and promote action towards achieving a greener, more sustainable future – **SDG 6 and SDG 7**
- A WSIS&SDG TalkX session in celebration of the [UN International Days on Disaster Risk Reduction](#), in collaboration with ITU and UNDRR. The session highlighted the importance of early warning dissemination and communication for early warning systems (EWS) and explored the opportunities that the growing availability and reach of mobile networks and services offers to reach communities at risk, to warn about an imminent disaster, and to provide people with actionable advice – **SDG 6 and SDG 7**
- Supporting efforts by providing a ready resource of best practices, such as the [WSIS Stocktaking](#) database. Coordinated by ITU since 2004, the database has been collecting information and communication projects that are contributing to the implementation of WSIS Action Lines, including projects/policies that are linked with the SDGs under review – **SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 9, SDG 11, SDG 17**
- The [Mayors track](#) at the WSIS Forum 2022 and 2023, co-organized by ITU and Geneva Cities Hub, provided an opportunity to discuss how smart cities are the drivers of innovative sustainable development and enablers to respond to challenges related to climate change and achievement of the SDGs. The Mayors showcased tangible projects and local achievements that can serve as models for scalable and replicable digital solutions for climate change adaptation and energy transition. They also interacted during a multistakeholder [High-Level Dialogue](#) engaging with High-Level representatives from the private sector, UN organizations and the civil society on ways to accelerate digital transformation and building more resilient cities – **SDG 9 and SDG 11**
- A WSIS&SDG TalkX session in celebration of the [World Cities Day](#), in collaboration with the ITU and Geneva Cities Hub, and in cooperation with UN-Habitat. This session highlighted cases of how digital technologies are helping cities in building effective water management systems in cities and implementing digital transformation in cities for effective climate actions – **SDG 9 and SDG 11**
- A special track on *ICTs for Emerging Technologies and Industry 4.0* was organized at the WSIS Forum to explore how frontier technological solutions can address sustainable development challenges and facilitate innovation in rapidly changing world – **SDG 9 and SDG 17**
- The value and principle of multistakeholder cooperation and engagement have characterized the WSIS process since its inception. Initiatives such as the [WSIS Stocktaking Repository of Women in Technology](#), the [WSIS Multi-stakeholder Alliance on ICTs and Older Persons](#), and the [WSIS Generation Connect Youth Prize](#), embody the spirit of the WSIS Forum – **SDG 17**

The WSIS Forum highlighted various topics, ranging from the role of ICTs in promoting digital inclusion and connectivity, accessibility, capacity building, older persons, to the potential of emerging technologies like AI and blockchain in driving economic growth and development. Other areas of focus included the importance of cybersecurity, the need for data protection and privacy, and the role of digital innovation in tackling global challenges, such as climate change and the digital divide.

Although the WSIS process has made significant progress in the past 20 years, there are still numerous complex challenges that need to be addressed in order to fully harness the potential of ICTs for sustainable development.

### **SDG 9**

**Strengthening digital infrastructure:** Many countries and organizations have recognized the need to strengthen digital infrastructure to ensure that people have access to reliable internet connectivity, particularly in remote or underserved areas. The achievement of digital inclusion heavily relies on the development and deployment of adequate ICT infrastructure, but it is important to note that digital divides still persist among different demographic groups, such as those based on income, age, geography, and gender.

### **SDG 11**

**Building resilient smart cities:** As smart cities become more interconnected and rely on the Internet of Things (IoT), ensuring the security and privacy of citizens' data and information has become a key challenge. The increasing use of IoT devices and connected infrastructure creates vulnerabilities that can be exploited by cyber threats and attacks. Cybersecurity (WSIS Action Line C5) remains crucial in the planning and implementation of the smart cities.

### **SDG 17**

**Capacity development and ICTs:** Progress on SDG 17 has seen advancements in the integration of information and communications technology for capacity development within least developed countries. These nations have accelerated their growth, improving critical sectors like education, sciences, and economics, particularly in COVID times. While some progress made has paved the way for a more inclusive and sustainable societies, the inequalities between and within countries remain considerable, including on the capacities of public administrations and policymakers to create enabling environments, which at the same time protect human rights and address technology related risks.

## **C. Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerate progress towards multiple SDG targets, including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs**

The WSIS Forum recognizes the urgent need to promote the use of ICTs in response to global crises such as the pandemic, and as part of its efforts to advance the SDGs, the Forum actively seeks to foster collaboration and partnerships with all stakeholders.

The WSIS Forum activities are exemplified by a range of voluntary initiatives led by stakeholders aimed at generating momentum and action-oriented dialogues that drive COVID-19 recovery efforts and advance the SDGs through the implementation of WSIS Action Lines.

- The [WSIS&SDG TalkX](#) is a platform, both virtual and physical, dedicated to sharing experiences and inspirational stories about ICTs for development (implementation of the WSIS Action Lines for Development) by stakeholders all over the world. More than 40 physical and virtual sessions have been conducted, in which some of the sessions have been converted into podcasts and are available to listen and download at [WSIS&SDG TalkX](#)

[Podcast](#). At the request of stakeholders, the WSIS&SDG TalkX also serves as a platform to celebrate the UN international days by highlighting the ICTs component for sustainable development. The topics covered in the WSIS&SDG TalkX sessions are varied, including Food Loss and Waste, Smart Cities, ICTs and Disaster Risk Reduction, and many more.

- As a part of the WSIS Stocktaking efforts to promote the innovative use of ICTs, [the Coronavirus Response - ICT Case Repository](#) collected projects and activities dedicated to responding to the COVID-19 crisis.
- [A Global WSIS Response - Amid the Pandemic documentary](#). The first-ever WSIS documentary in response to COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the *WSIS Stocktaking: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response – ICT Case Repository*, this short film depicts efforts of WSIS stakeholders from across the world using ICTs to address some of the challenges caused by the pandemic. This in turn will help to further promote ICTs and WSIS as efficient tools to address emergencies and achieve the SDGs.
- COVID-19 related workshops. The sessions organised at the WSIS Forum also showcased innovative solutions and approaches for leveraging ICTs to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Kindly explore the WSIS Forum sessions for [2022](#) and [2023](#) in their respective agendas, which are available on the Forum’s website.
- [ICTs for Well-being and Happiness special track](#): The special track was launched at the WSIS Forum 2021, which consisted of a series of workshops focusing on efforts and success stories to promote healthy lives and well-being for everyone at all ages, in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.
- [WSIS Action Lines report](#) on *Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, that addressed the theme of HLPF 2022. This report highlights the initiatives undertaken by the facilitator and co-facilitators to implement the WSIS Action Lines, specifically in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **D. Assessment of the situation in the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda**

Despite some progress towards achieving the SDGs, there are still many targets that have not been met or are lagging behind, particularly in developing countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the existing disparities and has threatened to derail progress towards achieving the SDGs. The WSIS community is committed to working together to address the challenges and seize the opportunities presented by the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

WSIS is also working closely with the [United Nations Group on the Information Society \(UNGIS\)](#) members to accelerate digital development for all. The UNGIS [Digital Transformation repository](#), serves as a reference guide and repository for UN Agencies on different implemented initiatives/activities showing the direct impact of the WSIS Action Lines on SDGs.

At the regional level, WSIS continues working in close collaboration with all the five UN Regional Commissions towards strengthening the implementation of WSIS Action Lines and SDGs.

The ITU Secretary-General has a Roadmap for the WSIS+20 review, which was presented at the PP-22, and the UNESCO Director-General has a *Roadmap Towards the WSIS+20 Review in 2025*, approved at the 41<sup>st</sup> session General Conference.

The implementation of the [WSIS Action Lines](#) is crucial for advancing the achievement of the SDGs. Therefore, it is important to maintain the alignment of the WSIS process with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as outlined in the [WSIS-SDG Matrix](#). The WSIS+20 multistakeholder discussions were initiated at the WSIS Forum 2022 and continued at the WSIS Forum 2023, which enabled stakeholders to provide valuable inputs on challenges and opportunities in implementing the WSIS Action Lines for the Sustainable Development Goals. The Commission on Science Technology and Development<sup>2</sup> will launch a process to collect inputs from Member States, all facilitators and other stakeholders that will feed substantive discussions during its 2024 and 2025 sessions, on the progress made in the implementation of WSIS outcomes in the last 20 years.

The [WSIS Stocktaking Process](#) was introduced to monitor implementation of the WSIS Action Lines and to showcase how ICTs can foster development. The WSIS Stocktaking portal is a unique global platform that provides an international register of ICT projects and activities carried out by governments, international organizations, the business sector, civil society and other entities.

The annual WSIS Forum has resulted in several outstanding outcomes, which include policy recommendations, achievements, publications, and other measures that reflect the strong commitment towards the WSIS process and its goals.

Key outcomes of the WSIS Forum 2022 include the following publications that show clear linkages between the WSIS Action Lines and SDGs:

- [WSIS Forum 2022: Outcome Document](#)
- [WSIS Forum 2022 High Level Track Outcomes and Executive Brief](#)
- [WSIS Stocktaking Report 2022](#)
- [WSIS Forum 2022 and SDG Matrix](#)
- [WSIS Stocktaking Success Stories 2022](#)
- [WSIS Forum 2022: Report - WSIS Action Lines: Building back better from the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)

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- [WSIS Stocktaking Report 2023](#)
- [WSIS Stocktaking Success Stories 2023](#)
- [WSIS Forum 2023 and SDG Matrix](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://unctad.org/topic/commission-on-science-and-technology-for-development>

- [WSIS Forum 2023 Report WSIS Action Lines: Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels](#)

## E. Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023 SDG Summit

- It is critical to continue prioritizing ICTs as a key enabler of development. The SDG Summit should reiterate the commitment to harnessing the potential of ICTs to achieve the 2030 Agenda and other internationally agreed development goals. It should urge all governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, the technical and academic communities and all other relevant stakeholders to integrate ICTs into their approaches to accelerate progress towards the SDGs.<sup>3</sup>
- The WSIS process provides a framework for the ICT ecosystem through the WSIS Action Lines and the WSIS-SDG Matrix to align WSIS efforts with the SDGs. The interlinkage between WSIS Action Lines and the SDGs and targets can be a reference for ongoing processes, such as the UN SG's Our Common Agenda, Global Digital Compact, etc.
- The WSIS Forum is a crucial component of the WSIS process, which provides an inclusive and equitable platform to discuss, network, and share best practices on ICTs for sustainable development.
- The value and principles of the WSIS model of multistakeholder cooperation and engagement have been fundamental to the development of the information and knowledge societies, and to the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines and the SDGs. WSIS special initiatives such as the [WSIS Stocktaking Repository of Women in Technology](#), the [WSIS Multi-stakeholder Alliance on ICTs and Older Persons](#), and the [WSIS Generation Connect Youth Prize](#), embody the spirit of the WSIS Forum.
- All stakeholders should contribute to the upcoming WSIS+20 review (and beyond 2025), that will take stock the achievements of the WSIS process and identify the opportunities and challenges in implementing the WSIS Action Lines.

<sup>3</sup> Resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council on 21 July 2022: Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (E/RES/2022/15); available at: <https://www.undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=E%2FRES%2F2022%2F15&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>