



WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS) FORUM CONTRIBUTION TO THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (HLPF) 2024

HLPF 2024 Theme: *Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions.*

SDGs under review: The HLPF in 2024 will review in-depth: Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

1. Impacts of multiple crises on the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body.

In the wake of multiple crises, the transformative potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as critical enablers of sustainable development has become increasingly evident. These crises, including but not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturns, climate change-related disasters, and conflicts, have heightened existing inequalities, hindered progress towards the SDGs, created online-based vulnerabilities and risks for human rights defenders including journalists, and posed significant challenges to global cooperation and sustainable development. ICTs are instrumental not only in recovery efforts but also in building resilience for the future. WSIS Forum recognizes the importance of harnessing ICTs to address these challenges and drive progress towards achieving the SDGs.

The WSIS Forum serves a key platform for advancing sustainable development and fostering inclusive and knowledge societies. Through its outcomes and initiatives, the Forum facilitates digital transformation and development, ultimately contributing to the realization of the SDGs. By bringing together diverse stakeholders in an open and inclusive manner, the Forum promotes dialogue, cooperation, and knowledge exchange to address the complex issues surrounding ICTs and development.

An existing cornerstone of the WSIS process and its Forum is the critical importance of multistakeholder participation in shaping the digital agenda. Through active engagement with governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, technical community, international organizations, and other stakeholders, the WSIS Forum encourages the policies and initiatives are people-centered, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all. The [WSIS Stocktaking database](#) serves as a valuable repository of information on ICT for development activities, highlighting the contributions of various stakeholders to the implementation of WSIS Action Lines.

Looking ahead, there is a pressing need to accelerate action and scale up efforts to leverage ICTs for sustainable development. By leveraging the outcomes of WSIS and fostering greater collaboration among stakeholders, we can harness the full potential of ICTs to build resilient, secure, inclusive, and sustainable societies for the future.

For SDG 1 (No Poverty), the economic crises, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, have pushed millions back into poverty, thereby hampering the efforts to eradicate poverty in all its forms everywhere. Likewise, for SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), the crises have disrupted food supply chains, resulting in food insecurity and exacerbating the number of people suffering from hunger. Climate crises have significantly impacted SDG 13 (Climate Action). The increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters, coupled with the slow pace of global action, have complicated efforts to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. The multiple crises have also affected SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Social and political unrest, conflicts, and the erosion of trust in institutions have posed significant challenges to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, and in the process created specific risks for institutions and groups like journalists who are the forefront of defending human rights and other fundamental freedoms. Regarding SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), the crises have underscored the importance of strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development. However, the crises have also strained resources and partnerships, impeding collaboration efforts.

ICTs play a crucial role in mitigating the impacts of these crises and accelerating progress towards these SDGs. WSIS promotes strengthening international cooperation, the use of ICTs, and leveraging digital transformation to overcome the challenges posed by these crises and advance the SDGs. WSIS remains committed to working with all stakeholders to harness the power of ICTs in achieving the SDGs.

2. Three key areas where sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions for achieving the SDGs are being effectively delivered, especially related to the cluster of SDGs under review in 2024, considering the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets.

WSIS, through its Action Lines, supports the use of ICTs to achieve the SDGs. The interlinkages across these goals also highlight the importance of a holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development. The [WSIS-SDG Matrix](#) developed by WSIS Action Line Facilitators serves as a tool to map, analyze and coordinate the implementation of WSIS Action Lines, and more specifically, ICTs as enablers and accelerators of the SDGs. The Matrix establishes clear linkages between the WSIS Action Lines and the SDGs, further enhancing the role of ICTs in fostering sustainable development. The WSIS framework aspires towards universal meaningful connectivity for a trusted connected world.

The WSIS process contributes towards the SDGs through various platforms, in particular the [WSIS Forum](#), the [WSIS Stocktaking](#), the [WSIS Prizes](#), and the [WSIS&SDG TalkX](#), where stakeholders have an opportunity to showcase examples of projects/initiatives that contribute to **SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17**.

Three key areas related to the cluster of SDGs under review include inclusive digital access, sustainable digital transformation, and global digital cooperation.

- 1. Inclusive digital access and digital capacity building/competencies** are foundational to achieving SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by ensuring that marginalized communities have equitable opportunities to participate in socio-economic activities and governance processes. To maximize the social, economic and environmental benefits of the information and knowledge societies, governments need to create a trustworthy, transparent and non-discriminatory legal, regulatory and policy environment. At the WSIS Forum, stakeholders engage in discussions and galvanize actions to bridge the digital divide and foster digital inclusion. This emphasis includes initiatives like

community networks, affordable internet connectivity, capacity building, digital competencies training, media and information literacy development and digital financial services like mobile banking in driving economic development and prosperity. recognize digital projects that use ICTs to drive positive change and address societal challenges. During the WSIS Forum 2023, stakeholders highlighted that confidence and security are among the main pillars of the information and knowledge societies. The WSIS Forum also provided an opportunity to explore with multiple stakeholders the issues at stake, notably in addressing climate change data.

2. **Sustainable digital transformation** underpins SDGs 2 (Zero Hunger), 13 (Climate Action), 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by leveraging technology to enhance agricultural productivity, mitigate climate change impacts, ensuring that freedom of expression, access to information and safety of journalists are fully guaranteed, while various stakeholders, including Member States, deal with the problems of dis- and misinformation and hate speech, including online, and foster global partnerships for development. Infrastructure is central in achieving the goal of digital inclusion, enabling universal, sustainable, ubiquitous and affordable access to ICTs by all, taking into account relevant solutions already in place in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, to provide sustainable connectivity and access to remote and marginalized areas at national and regional levels. At the WSIS Forum, stakeholders exchange best practices on leveraging digital technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and blockchain to achieve sustainability goals while protecting fundamental human rights and minimizing environmental impacts. The [WSIS Stocktaking database](#) provides an international register of ICT projects and activities carried out by governments, international organizations, the business sector, civil society and other entities. This database can be used as a reference point to identify successful practices, innovate solutions, and stimulate collaboration, thereby furthering the global commitment to sustainable digital transformation.
 3. **Global digital cooperation** is crucial to progress all SDGs. It fosters collaboration in areas such as digital governance, data sharing, and technology transfer. WSIS stands as a strong example of global digital cooperation in action for over two decades, with its Action Lines withstanding the test of time. They remain relevant today, providing a robust framework for digital progress moving forward. Over two decades, WSIS has grown into a huge multistakeholder, global community, not only at the international level but also as a grassroots movement, and it continues to expand with each passing year. The WSIS process and its initiatives strengthen the global commitment to using digital cooperation as a tool to advance the SDGs.
- 3. Three examples of specific actions, policies and measures that are most urgently needed to effectively deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving the SDGs.**

The vision of WSIS, which aims to create inclusive, people-centred, development-oriented information and knowledge societies aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's commitment to 'leave no one behind.' Promoting universal access to information, fostering digital inclusion, supporting digital competencies and media and information literacy, and utilizing ICTs as tools for advancement, significantly contribute to poverty eradication. This approach, supported by WSIS, ensures that the benefits of the digital age are accessible to everyone, playing a significant role in the global fight against poverty.

Three specific actions, policies, and measures that are urgently needed to deliver sustainable, resilient, and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty, building on WSIS's principles and outcomes, include:

- 1. Enhancing access to digital technologies:** Lack of access to digital technologies is a form of poverty in today's digital age. It is essential for policymakers to formulate strategies fostering the affordability and universal availability of broadband infrastructure, digital competencies and media and information literacy programmes, and online services. It is also important to ensure the existence and implementation of access to information laws that guarantee inclusion, disability rights, and gender equality, as well as access to the internet, which is crucial for access to information in the digital age. This emphasis is particularly important in underserved and remote areas. The implementation of such strategies can catalyze opportunities in education, employment, and entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to poverty reduction. Efforts should be made to expand access to various digital technologies, including the internet, mobile phones, and digital platforms, thereby empowering individuals and communities with crucial information, knowledge, and socio-economic prospects. Furthermore, fostering public-private partnerships and community-based initiatives will be pivotal in bridging the digital divide and ensuring inclusive digital access for all.
- 2. Bridging digital skills and technology transfer:** While providing access to digital technologies is essential, it is equally critical to ensure that individuals possess the requisite digital skills to leverage these tools effectively. This involves efforts in education and capacity building to increase digital competencies, particularly among disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and public administrations, as well as media and information literacy skills. Furthermore, it is important to strengthen the media coverage of climate change and environmental degradation, helping media organizations enhance their capacities to use intelligence tools and technology to gather facts, sort and analyse data on the climate change situation and environmental issues at large. The WSIS Forum provides a multistakeholder platform for implementation activities, information exchange, creation of knowledge, sharing of best practices and foster partnerships to advance development goals.
- 3. Promoting multi-stakeholder cooperation and partnerships:** Promoting multi-stakeholder cooperation and partnerships lies at the heart of the WSIS mission. WSIS, embodying its core principle of multistakeholder involvement, emphasizes the importance of fostering synergy among diverse stakeholders including governments, the private sector, civil society, academia, the technical community, and international organizations. By leveraging the unique expertise, resources, and networks of each stakeholder, more innovative and impactful solutions can be developed. By integrating ICTs into development strategies, we can accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. The focus on international and regional cooperation, in line with WSIS Action Line C11, is key to promoting universal digital access and reducing the digital divide. Several collaborations amongst stakeholders are displayed in the agenda and outcome document of the annual WSIS Forum.

D. Follow-up actions and measures being undertaken by your intergovernmental body to support implementation of the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit.

The annual WSIS Forum provides a platform to showcase trends, innovative ICT projects, and initiatives that directly align with WSIS Action Lines, reinforcing the critical role of ICTs in advancing the SDGs. As referenced in the Political Declaration, science, technology, and innovation serve as drivers of sustainable development, emphasizing the importance of building capacities necessary for

sustainable transformations, all of which are echoed and reinforced through WSIS outcomes shaping global agendas alongside the 2030 Agenda and other essential frameworks.

The upcoming [WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event](#), which will be held from 27 to 31 May 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland will serve as a platform for multistakeholder exchanges and a catalyst for action, taking stock of achievements, key trends, and challenges since the 2003 Geneva Plan of Action. It will also be a noteworthy opportunity for the international community to assess opportunities for global digital cooperation and join forces towards a forward-looking and reinvigorated shared vision, informing the UN Summit of the Future. The WSIS Forum 2023 was chaired by H.E. Dr. Emilija Stojmenova Duh, Minister of Digital Transformation, Republic of Slovenia. Kindly refer [here](#) for more information on the WSIS Forum 2023 highlights and outcomes.

WSIS acknowledged that collective action and partnership are essential for realizing the vision of a more sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous future for all.

E. Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF.

- It is critical to continue prioritizing ICTs as a key enabler of development. It is paramount to 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.
- The [Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action](#) and [Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society](#), as the outcomes of WSIS remain the only inter-governmentally agreed global documents on ICTs and digital technologies adopted by the Heads of States and Government. These represent the foundation of global digital policies and cooperation supporting our shared vision of people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented information and knowledge societies that fully respects and upholds the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- WSIS is an integral and dynamic process which has evolved over the years to be in keeping with technology changes. The WSIS+20 process offers the perfect opportunity to review what needs to be included. The WSIS framework is very inclusive and can adapt to new technology, e.g., AI, quite seamlessly.
- 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, along with their respective targets, provides a valuable reference point for ongoing initiatives such as the UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda and the Global Digital Compact.
- 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 WSIS model of multistakeholder cooperation and engagement embodies enduring value and principles that have been foundational to the advancement of information and knowledge societies.

- 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.