Cross-stakeholder views on WSIS+20 at ICANN84: workshop outcomes

During ICANN84 in Dublin, Global Partners Digital (GPD) and the Global Network Initiative (GNI) held a hands-on workshop *Safeguarding Multistakeholder Internet Governance: Building Alliances in WSIS+20*. It brought together diverse members of the Internet governance community to exchange perspectives on the WSIS+20 review and explore opportunities to coordinate advocacy across stakeholder groups. This workshop was partly supported by the inaugural ICANN Grant Program through the *Shaping the WSIS+20 Review for a Unified Internet Multistakeholderism (SWUIM) project*.

Governments, the technical community, industry and civil society from around the world came together with the aim of strengthening multistakeholder participation in the review. During the workshop, stakeholders discussed four topics within the WSIS review, chosen as being areas where different stakeholders might be able to align. The below summary reflects discussions within groups, rather than common positions or the position of any participant, but illustrates the concerns of a broadly representative mix of stakeholders engaged in the WSIS+20 review process.

Connectivity and Access

The discussion focused on the need to strengthen language on connectivity and access in the zero draft:

- Participants agreed that connectivity and access is a foundational and underpinning issue that must be addressed for other elements in the Zero Draft to be achieved. This includes areas such as Digital Public Infrastructure, Artificial Intelligence, and Data Governance. This could be more strongly emphasised throughout the text.
- They discussed the need to include references to existing national, regional, and global efforts on connectivity and access and encourage governments and relevant international bodies to evaluate, assess, and implement existing efforts.
- They also emphasised the need to promote a rights-respecting, enabling environment for investment into connectivity solutions. Participants agreed that text developed by the UK government was a good basis for reflecting existing initiatives: *"We acknowledge that the fostering of competition, the creation of transparent, predictable, independent and non-discriminatory regulatory and legal systems, proportionate taxation and licensing fees,*

access to finance, facilitation of public private partnerships, multi-stakeholder cooperation, national and regional broadband strategies, efficient allocation of the radio frequency spectrum, infrastructure sharing models, community-based approaches and public access facilities have in many countries facilitated significant gains in connectivity and sustainable development."

Data Governance and Artificial Intelligence

The discussion centred on how WSIS+20 can most effectively engage with existing UN work on data and artificial intelligence, while avoiding duplication.

- Participants agreed that the goal should be to build on existing initiatives across the UN system and avoid duplication, highlighting that the Zero Draft takes an effective approach by reaffirming the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the initiatives it created including the CSTD Working Group on Data Governance, the Global Dialogue on AI Governance and the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI.
- However, they noted that the Global Digital Compact (GDC) does not have the maturity of the WSIS and lacks a decentralised multistakeholder structure, while WSIS provides a tested and inclusive framework that has evolved over two decades of practice. They therefore emphasized the importance of considering how to align the GDC with WSIS without pre-empting the work currently underway as a result of the GDC.
- Participants also discussed cross-border data flows, surveillance through data, state overreach and corporate overreach but felt these were difficult topics on which to reach consensus. The environmental sustainability of data use and artificial intelligence and user-centricity as an essential guiding principle for data governance were also under discussion briefly.

WSIS Architecture

The discussion on WSIS architecture focused on the tension between Internet governance and broader digital governance within the Zero Draft.

- A way to reconcile this could be through clearer recognition of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as the principal multistakeholder forum for discussion of all WSIS-related issues. Strengthening this point in the text was seen as key to reinforcing the coherence and continuity of the WSIS model.
- Participants discussed the need to future-proof the WSIS architecture in light of broader UN reform efforts that are already underway. It was emphasised that reforms should be anchored in existing WSIS language and institutions, rather than creating new mechanisms or agencies. In particular, there was support for reviewing and strengthening the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) to improve coordination across UN bodies.
- On financing, the group cautioned against prescriptive language, instead suggesting references to accountability and flexibility in resource use.

Human rights & the open, free, interoperable, globally interconnected internet

The discussion focused on reaffirming two foundational principles of the WSIS vision: human rights and an open, interoperable, and globally interconnected Internet.

- Participants discussed how the original WSIS outcomes helped to enshrine the multistakeholder approach to governing the Internet as a public commons. They also noted that international human rights law is a guiding framework for governing digital technologies to achieve the WSIS goals.
- They discussed the importance of maintaining the language rejecting models of state-controlled or fragmented Internet architectures, and some noted the potential utility of elaborating the language on Internet shutdowns to include reference to blocking, throttling or filtering measures.
- However, there was broad agreement that as long as the Zero Draft retains a strong commitment to the multistakeholder approach and is anchored in international human rights law, it will provide a sound basis for advancing the WSIS vision.
- On the IGF, the group emphasised the need to continue the mandate of the IGF and to strengthen it. A way to do this could be for the IGF to play an agenda-setting role for the multilateral agenda, creating a constructive feedback loop and incentivising greater participation by all stakeholders.