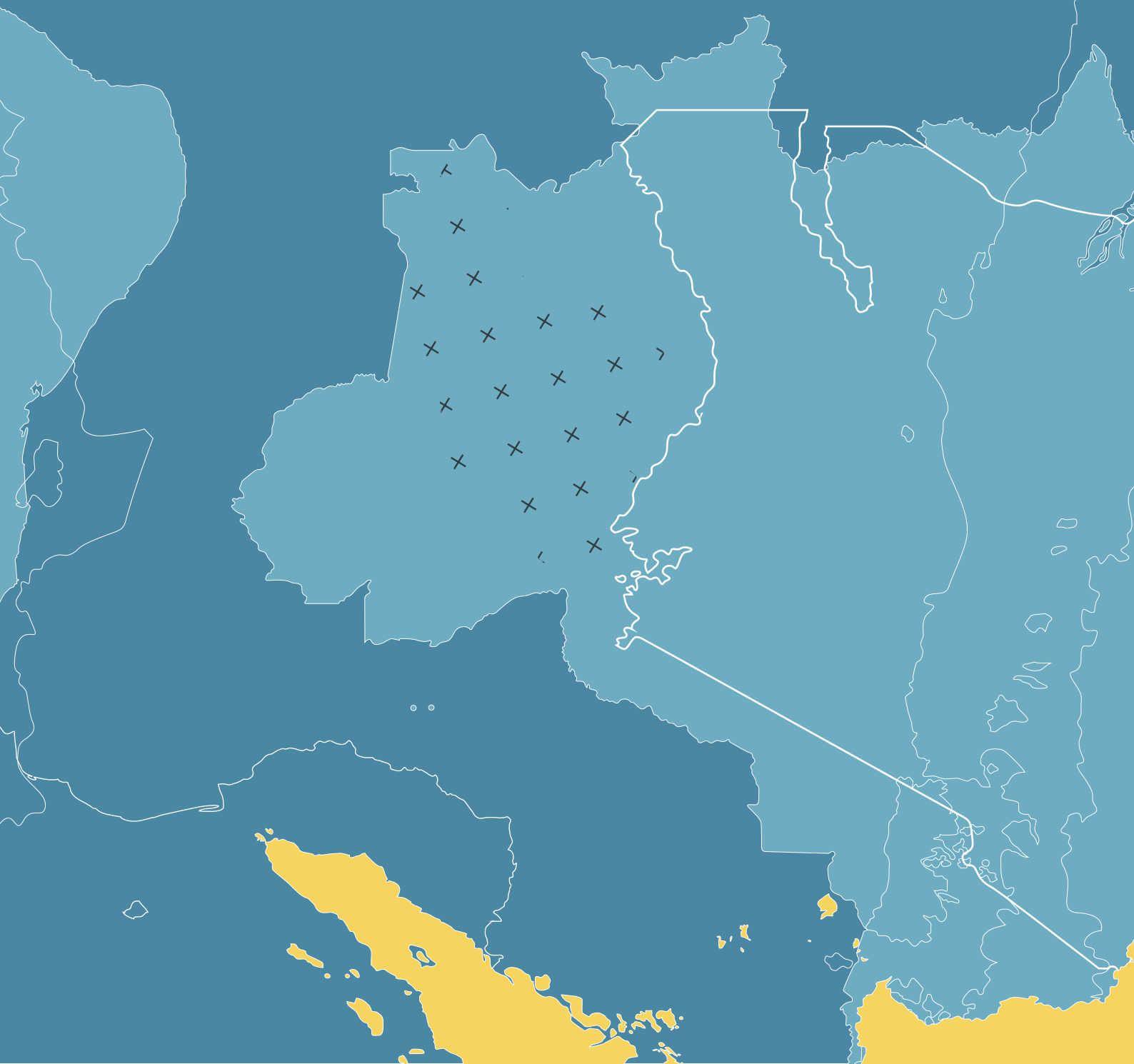


The Road to WSIS+20:

Key Country Perspectives in the
Twenty-Year Review of the World
Summit on the Information Society



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Introduction

The World Summit on the Information Society

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was convened in two phases in 2003 and 2005 to address the growing impact of information and communications technologies (ICTs) on society. At a time when there was no agreed framework for digital cooperation or internet governance, WSIS was a groundbreaking initiative. For the first time, a global forum brought together heads of state, stakeholders from across sectors, and UN agencies to develop a shared vision for an inclusive, development-oriented information society.

The outcomes of the original WSIS summits have had lasting influence. The Geneva Plan of Action set out Action Lines to guide progress towards a people-centred information society, while the Tunis Agenda introduced a distributed, multistakeholder model of internet governance and established the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). These documents remain foundational to digital policy discussions today. In 2015, the ten-year review (WSIS+10) reaffirmed these frameworks and extended the IGF's mandate, though broader systemic change was limited.

Now, twenty years on, the WSIS+20 process provides an opportunity to assess whether the WSIS outcomes, and the institutions built around them, remain fit for purpose. The landscape has shifted dramatically. Emerging technologies, evolving security threats, and deepening digital divides raise urgent questions about equity, governance, and rights. At the same time, the international environment has grown more fragmented, with new structures such as the Office on Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET) and the Global Digital Compact shaping parallel discussions. These developments challenge both the coherence of digital governance across the UN system and the ability of less-resourced stakeholders to meaningfully engage.

Project Background and Scope

This report aims to support engagement in the WSIS+20 process by providing insight into the positions and priorities of selected governments. The chapters in this report were produced as part of the *Shaping the WSIS+20 Review for a Unified Internet Multistakeholderism* project coordinated by the Global Network Initiative and Global Partners Digital with support from the inaugural [ICANN Grant Program](#).

This project aims to ensure the voices from the Global Majority and technical community are represented in the WSIS+20 review process. It spans Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ghana, India, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia. Partners include the Centre for Communications Governance at the National Law University, New Delhi, Data Privacy Brazil, Derechos Digitales, Digitally Right, Fundación Karisma, Media Foundations for West Africa, Paradigm Initiative, and Research ICT Africa.

In addition, this report also includes research chapters on China, the European Union (EU), Indonesia, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), Russia, Saudi Arabia and Switzerland. These chapters focus on countries which are expected to be influential during the negotiations are included to support advocacy efforts, particularly by Global Majority civil society, by increasing understanding of a range of countries' national positions.

Methodology

Each chapter in this report was based on the same research framework and offers country-specific analysis of the actors driving each position, their motivations, and the implications for human rights, development, and internet governance.

In Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ghana, India, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zambia the drafting of these chapters began with national workshops involving policymakers, local civil society, the private sector, and the technical community. These served as a key source of information for the research, together with analysis of government official positions, communiques, interventions, and policies. In some cases, these sources of information were combined with expert interviews.

For the additional chapters on China, the European Union, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Russia, the chapters drew on desk research combined with expert interviews.

As some information shared in the chapters was communicated during interviews or drawn from non-public documents, citation has not always been possible. The report reflects the state of play at a particular moment in a fluid process, before the Elements Paper is released and at the beginning of the consultation process. Countries positions may change throughout the WSIS+20 review process.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh's engagement with the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) has consistently reflected Global South priorities, including access, affordability, and technology transfer. However, while it initially embraced a multistakeholder model, its approach has gradually shifted toward a more centralised and state-driven form of digital governance.

Bangladesh participated actively in the 2003 Geneva Summit, sending one of the largest Global South delegations. But under successive administrations, civil society participation declined significantly due to digital repression, internet shutdowns, and restrictive legal frameworks. Government involvement continued through the Aspire to Innovate (a2i) programme, BTRC, and relevant ministries, with a strong emphasis on development-focused digital platforms.

Since the 2024 political transition, there has been renewed momentum for reform. While no formal WSIS+20 position has been announced, discussions on digital governance and multistakeholder engagement are re-emerging. Civil society, academia, and the private sector are beginning to re-engage with the WSIS process in an effort to reshape Bangladesh's future role in global digital governance.

Brazil

Brazil has been active in WSIS since the beginning of the process and, more broadly, in Internet Governance, establishing itself as a leading proponent of multilateral action rooted in the multistakeholder model. In recent years, especially under the current administration, Brazil has prioritized the digital agenda, focusing on issues related to connectivity, information integrity, digital public infrastructures, and artificial intelligence. These themes have been explored at the domestic and international level, linked to priorities such as reducing inequality and digital sovereignty and are likely to inform Brazil's positions during WSIS+20. Brazil's historic involvement with Internet Governance and regional influence could help to position the country as a key player in the WSIS+20 process.

The Brazilian government is prioritizing strengthening both the multistakeholder and multilateral models. More specific positions are still under discussion at the time of writing, with government representatives highlighting the review's rushed timeline, operational and capacity challenges arising from the government's structure, and the lack of clarity on coordination between the WSIS and the Global Digital Compact (GDC).

Chile

Chile's overall foreign policy agenda is focused on the defense of human rights, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and gender equity.

In regional discussions on digital policy, Chile has established itself as a leading and vocal advocate for the responsible governance of artificial intelligence (AI). In the context of the Global Digital Compact negotiations, Chile's position —aligned with the G77 + China— centered on defending the continuity and relevance of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) agenda. Chile also emphasized the importance of the multistakeholder mechanisms established through that process. Given its consistent commitment to multilateralism and the protection of human rights in international forums and processes, Chile is expected to prioritize these topics during the WSIS+20 review.

China

China views the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) as a strategic platform to advance its interests in global Internet governance, technological development, and digital sovereignty. China advocates for a multilateral model of Internet governance, where states play the central role, as opposed to the multistakeholder model favoured by Western democracies that includes civil society, the private sector, academia and the technical community. This vision aligns with China's preference for state control over information flows. China also uses WSIS to reinforce the idea of "cyberspace sovereignty", the right of each country to regulate the Internet within its own borders and without external interference. This principle is a core part of China's broader cyber strategy. To this end, China leverages WSIS as an opportunity to promote its Digital Silk Road initiative, part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes building digital infrastructure and exporting Chinese technology standards to developing countries. China participates actively in WSIS and related UN processes but is careful to shape the agenda in ways that do not compromise its domestic control over Internet content and infrastructure.

Colombia

Colombia is an active participant in the implementation and review of the WSIS. However, the country's priorities for the WSIS review remain unclear.

Global internet governance processes —historically the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), Latin American and Caribbean Internet Governance Forum (LACIGF) and ICANN, and recently the Global Digital Compact (GDC)— have served as spaces for successive Colombian governments to present their digital agendas. Areas of interest have mainly included Internet connectivity, inclusion, e-government and, more recently, data infrastructure and artificial intelligence. In general, Colombia's approach aligns with principles of human rights, multistakeholder participation, sustainability, and digital equity.

An official statement is expected during the WSIS+20 review process — likely similar to those issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the GDC negotiations and during WSIS+10 — outlining national programs and activities in line with the plan of action. It is anticipated that the Colombian Internet Governance Board (Mesa Colombiana de Gobernanza de Internet) will follow up on any eventual position shared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The European Union

The European Union (EU) has played an active role in the WSIS process since it first began twenty years ago, seeing it as a vehicle to expand access to digital technologies, advance digital cooperation, and to enable socio-economic development. Since then, digital technologies have become a core element of the EU's international strategy. The EU seeks to play a leadership role in WSIS+20 focusing on reinforcing a multistakeholder, rights-based, and open approach to digital governance, while promoting alignment with other global processes including the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The EU favours incremental changes to the original WSIS framework and opposes updates or additions to the Action Lines while considering how to best address technological developments and societal and geopolitical challenges. Key priorities include protecting and enhancing the multistakeholder approach to digital governance, defending the open and decentralised model of the internet, aligning the initiatives of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) into the WSIS process, and advancing human rights and democratic values in the digital age.

Ghana

Ghana has been a long-standing and active participant in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), regularly aligning its national digital policies with WSIS Action Lines. The country's engagement is grounded in multistakeholder principles, with the Ministry of Communications and Digital Technology and Innovation (MoCTI) leading initiatives that prioritise digital inclusion, e-governance, and rights-based ICT development. Civil society and private sector partners, such as the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, have played a significant role in shaping the national digital agenda.

Recent policy initiatives reflect Ghana's alignment with WSIS objectives, including broadband expansion for rural communities, digital education through smart classrooms, and gender empowerment via the Girls-in-ICT programme. Ghana's continued participation in the WSIS Forum and efforts to strengthen cybersecurity capacity demonstrate its commitment to inclusive, sustainable digital development and active global engagement.

India

India has consistently supported the multistakeholder model of digital governance since the WSIS process began. It hosted the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in 2008 and has continued to participate in subsequent reviews, advocating for affordable access, development-oriented policies, and more inclusive management of critical internet resources.

While reaffirming support for multistakeholderism, India also highlighted the lack of progress on enhanced cooperation. Based on its historical position, India continues

to support the multistakeholder model of internet governance, support for IGF, and development-oriented digital governance.

In recent years, India has been undergoing a rapid process of digitisation that is geared towards transformation of governance, capacity building, and promotion of technological innovation. India has also been positioning itself as a global technology leader, particularly through its emphasis on building Digital Public Infrastructure ('DPI') and by articulating Global Majority concerns at various international fora.

As the WSIS+20 progresses, India is seeking to leverage the potential of AI to drive the next phase of technology driven development and is likely to stress the importance of promoting multilingualism on the internet, and to focus on balancing multistakeholderism with digital sovereignty in matters of cybersecurity and national security.

Indonesia

Indonesia has taken a supportive but critical stance on Internet governance and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process. Indonesia supports the multistakeholder model of Internet governance but, simultaneously, has emphasized the role of governments in maintaining national sovereignty, cybersecurity, and public order in the digital space. Indonesia supports the WSIS framework and advocates for a democratic, inclusive, and secure Internet governance ecosystem, with increased involvement of developing countries and government leadership in national contexts. Its government often calls for reforms that better address the needs of countries in the Global South in digital development discussions while advocating for a balanced approach in the governance of the Internet.

Russia

Over the years, Russia has consistently promoted the principle of digital sovereignty and has implemented domestic policies to reinforce its control over Internet activities within its borders. The 2019 "Sovereign Internet Law" granted the Russian government powers to monitor Internet traffic and potentially isolate the Russian Internet segment from the global network. At an international level, Russia is prioritizing the creation of international norms for cybersecurity, and, to this end, it has proposed several UN initiatives, including a successful UN Convention on Cybercrime, related to countering the use of ICTs for criminal or destabilizing purposes. In general, with regards to the governance and management of the Internet, Russia emphasizes state control, national security, and a shift from Western-led models to multilateral structures that prioritize governmental authority. It views the current global Internet architecture as biased and vulnerable and pushes for reforms that reinforce digital sovereignty.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been increasingly active in the global digital and ICT (Information and Communications Technology) policy arena, including in forums like the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), reflecting its national transformation goals. Central to its policy strategy “Vision 2030”, the country aims to become a regional digital hub, focusing on the expansion of 5G networks, broadband access and data centers. It is also actively promoting its innovation ecosystem, primarily concentrating on bridging the digital divide, especially among youth and women. The Saudi government is actively seeking to position the country as a regional digital leader, attracting foreign investment, shaping global norms, while exerting soft power. Saudi Arabia is likely to take a proactive role in shaping the post-2025 WSIS agenda, possibly pushing for more private-sector inclusive, secure, and investment-friendly digital environments.

South Africa

South Africa played a key role in the original WSIS process, chairing committees that shaped the Geneva Declaration and Tunis Agenda. Its delegation was notable for involving civil society, the private sector, and academia.

Despite leadership instability—14 ministers and 7 Directors-General since 2003—South Africa has remained committed to WSIS, engaging in follow-up processes and generally supporting multistakeholder principles. Internationally, it has advocated for equitable digital governance that balances government leadership with inclusive participation and equal participation for all nations.

The WSIS+20 review has reinvigorated its engagement. The Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies will chair the 2025 High-Level Event in Geneva, and national consultations are focusing on universal connectivity, AI and data governance, and regulating tech giants whose power exceeds national oversight capacities. South Africa also highlights the risks of geopolitical tensions undermining development agendas and upholds human rights in digital governance. While supporting the IGF and WSIS Forum, it calls for stronger multilateral cooperation and reforms to multistakeholder processes to better support resource-limited countries.

Switzerland

Switzerland views the WSIS+20 review as a unique opportunity to create a stronger, more inclusive, and better-integrated framework for digital governance. It supports aligning the WSIS process with the ambitions of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while streamlining processes to reduce duplication and improve cost-efficiency. The review is seen as a chance to build bridges across the UN system to better serve all countries and stakeholders. Human rights are a core priority for Switzerland, which advocates for a human-centric digital approach that reinforces rights-based governance. It has also highlighted the importance of gender-responsive policy, calling for the WSIS+20

review to expand gender-inclusive language, address technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and close persistent digital divides. In addition, Switzerland can be expected to focus on Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs) into the WSIS framework, addressing digital divides, and improving artificial intelligence (AI) capacity building (particularly for the Global South).

Switzerland continues to champion the multistakeholder approach, pushing for an updated WSIS architecture that reflects the inclusive engagement that has defined the process since its inception. Domestically, Switzerland's WSIS+20 engagement is coordinated by the Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM). The national multi-stakeholder platform, "Plateforme Tripartite," originally established during the first WSIS phase, remains the key national forum for information exchange and WSIS implementation.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom continues to play a proactive role in the WSIS process. Its engagement is rooted in a long-standing commitment to open, rights-based, and multistakeholder models of digital governance. The UK sees WSIS as a key vehicle to advance sustainable development, digital inclusion, and meaningful cooperation among stakeholders. In the lead-up to WSIS+20, the UK remains focused on preserving the core WSIS framework while updating its implementation to address the opportunities and challenges of emerging technologies. Key priorities include a permanent mandate for the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), ensuring full stakeholder participation in the review process, defending human rights online, addressing gender digital divides and the environmental impact of ICTs and integrating the initiatives of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) into the WSIS process.

United States

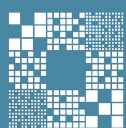
The United States has historically played a proactive role in the WSIS process, reflecting its long-standing support for human rights, the open internet and the multistakeholder approach to internet and digital governance. In the lead-up to the WSIS+20, the government is in a period of flux under a new administration and is currently reevaluating its commitments to multilateral institutions and withdrawing from international bodies and processes which do not reflect its policy objectives.¹ This shift has already played out in the build-up to the WSIS review,² although how precisely this will impact on the formal review process is still to be determined.

At the same time, the US appears poised to maintain its support for the WSIS as a key framework to advance digital transformation, multistakeholder governance, and participatory modalities. The government is expected to uphold its support for the mandate renewal of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the preservation of the existing action lines, and the non-duplication of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and WSIS processes.

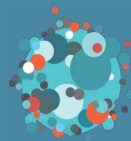
Zambia

Zambia has been engaged in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) from its inception, when it joined the 2003 Summit. In those initial meetings, Zambia highlighted the importance of bridging the digital divide and called for particular attention to the identification of possible mechanisms for the realisation of the resolutions of the Summit. Since then, senior government officials have participated in WSIS meetings, and Zambia has launched initiatives, including work with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), aimed at achieving the WSIS Action Line – C2 on Information and communication infrastructure.

Recent priorities have focused on leveraging Zambia's position as co-facilitator of the GDC to advocate for its priorities: inclusive policies addressing digital divides, capacity-building initiatives and fostering of partnerships that amplify the voices of the underrepresented regions in global digital governance discussions. Zambia's involvement in the WSIS process and its role as co-facilitator of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) reflect a growing ambition for leadership in shaping global digital governance, with a strong emphasis on inclusive development and regional cooperation.



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