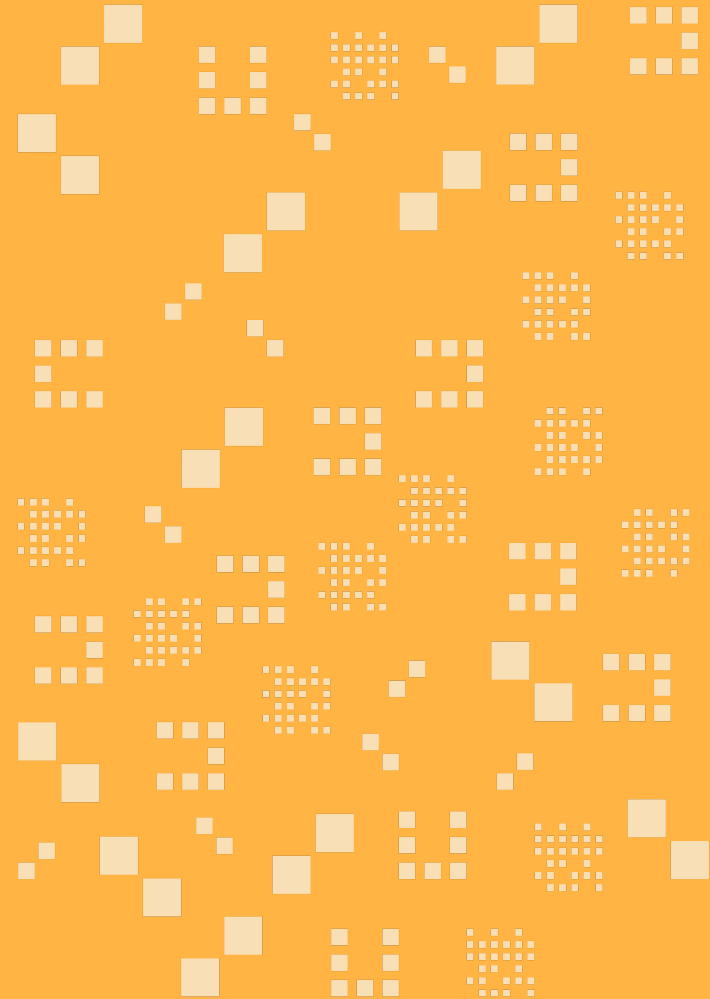


Stakeholder Positions on WSIS+20 Elements Paper

Comparative Analysis

September 2025

GLOBAL PARTNERS DIGITAL



Introduction

This is an analysis of government and other stakeholder submissions to the Elements Paper for the WSIS+20 Review. It is intended to **help identify different actors' priorities at this early stage**, as well as areas of **potential convergence or divergence**, shedding light on which topics are likely to provoke the most discussion. This report will be useful to guide civil society and other actors' **advocacy during negotiations on the Zero Draft**.

What is the Elements Paper?

The Elements Paper serves as an initial input for the eventual outcome document for WSIS+20 Review, which assess progress made on WSIS over the last twenty years and consider the future of global digital governance. The Elements Paper was published in July 2025 and guided the content to be included in the Zero Draft, the initial outcome document of the WSIS+20 Review, published in late August 2025.

Level of Consensus Across Key Issue Areas

- Broad
- Mixed
- Contested

Consensus Summary

1. Action Lines



Seen as a valuable element of WSIS but there is strong disagreement about whether they need to be maintained, adapted, or new Action Lines created.

2. Access & Inclusion



Clear priority across the board, with some divergence in approaches to addressing the challenges of increasing inclusion and different understandings of the root causes of digital divides.

3. Human Rights



Clear area of concern for some, while others emphasise state sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. Strong emphasis (amongst those prioritising human rights) on the need to mainstream specific human rights frameworks and mechanisms. Divergence on the prioritisation of different human rights, the situation of specific groups, and on how to embed accountability mechanisms.

4. Private Sector Accountability



Recognition of the central role of the private sector in digital development, but divergence in prioritisation of issues arising from monopolies, market concentration, or on enabling innovation. Taxation of the private sector a common theme in some Global Majority submissions.

5. AI & Data Governance



Clear topic of concern, but strong disagreement on whether and how this topic should be dealt with in the WSIS+20 review.

6. Internet Governance & Multistakeholderism



Wide support for aligning the language on Internet governance with previous agreements, and also agreement on the importance of the IGF. While there is broad support for multistakeholder internet governance, there are notable voices pushing for greater intergovernmental discussions.

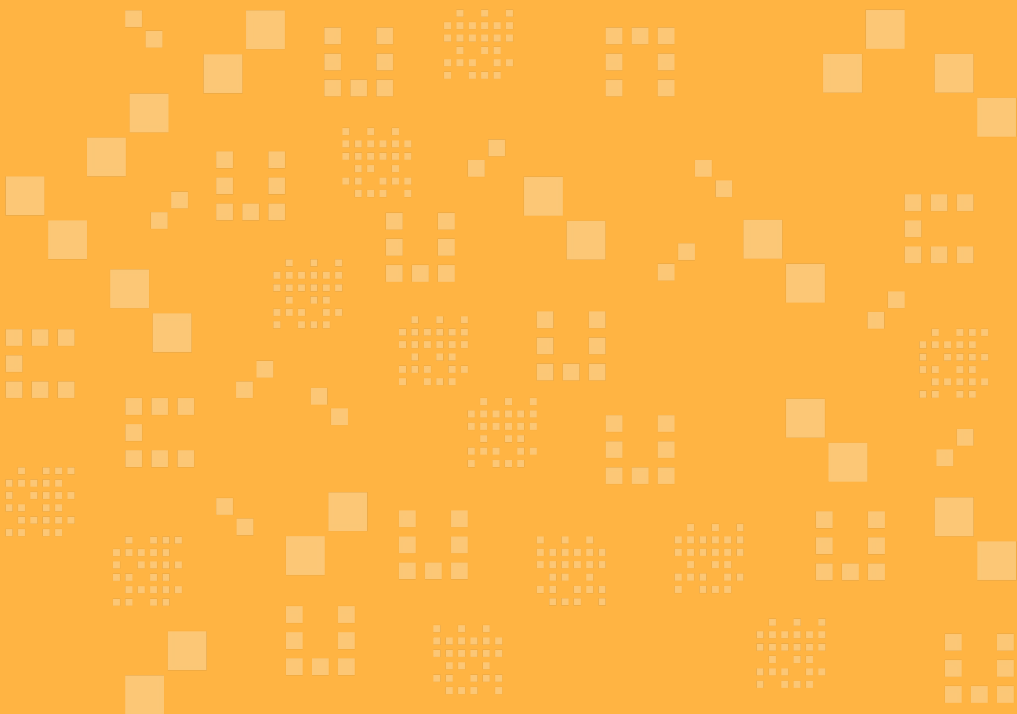
Level of Consensus Across Key Issue Areas

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| | Consensus | Summary |
|----------------------------------|-----------|--|
| 7. Enhanced Cooperation | ● | Strong divergence between not reopening discussions on this topic and continuing discussions and/or moving to operationalisation, as well as clear differences in understanding of whether this is a multistakeholder or intergovernmental concept. |
| 8. IGF Renewal & Strengthening | ● | Almost universal support for the continuation of the IGF mandate and recognition of its important role, with different opinions on the length of the mandate (extended or permanent), how this should be enabled and methods for strengthening the IGF. |
| 9. Development of WSIS Framework | ● | Broad support for aligning the GDC and WSIS and fairly strong support for integrating the GDC through the WSIS, but some proposals continue to err towards the separation of processes. Concrete proposals for alignment require further policy development. |
| 10. Follow-up & Review | ● | Broad recognition of the need for stronger monitoring and fairly broad calls for better measurement and indicators, with differing focus on metrics. |
| 11. Financing | ● | Divide between submissions which suggest relying on existing mechanisms for financing and public-private partnerships versus proposals which focus on obligations, taxation, and the need for new funds. |

Key Issues

Detailed
Breakdown



1. Action Lines

Areas of Agreement

- WSIS Action Lines widely credited as **contributing to WSIS success**.
- Strong but not total agreement that the **technology-neutral framing** of Action Lines has been useful.

Areas of Disagreement

- Divergence on whether Action Lines should evolve through **adaptation, additions, or remain** the same.
- Many (e.g. EU, Canada/Australia, Internet Society) oppose reopening or adding new Action Lines and prefer **incremental updates**.
- Some (India, Cuba, UN Women, GDJF, Togo) propose **new/updated lines** (e.g. gender, Digital Public Infrastructure, AI, data governance, green ICT).
- Others, like the Dominican Republic and Togo, suggest **adaptations** to existing Action Lines to account for **new technologies**.
- Calls to institutionalise **Action Line facilitators' accountability** (Cuba, G77).

Areas Needing Development

- Countries who advocate for adapting **existing Action Lines** should put forward suggestions on how to do this.
- Given calls for accountability, roadmaps and **action plans** with measurable targets **linking SDGs, GDC, and gender** (EU, UK, UNGIS, IMSB) would be useful.
- Stronger cross-cutting integration of **gender and human rights** (UN Women, OHCHR, GDRC-WSIS).

2. Access & Inclusion

Areas of Agreement

- **Bridging digital divides** is almost universally prioritised.
- **Connectivity, affordability, and digital skills** highlighted as enablers.
- Importance of **meaningful access** is widely acknowledged.

Areas of Disagreement

- Disagreement over whether access is primarily an **economic, social, or political challenge**.
- Some focus on **infrastructure and literacy** (Canada/Australia, UK).
- Others stress **structural inequalities, sanctions**, moving away from market-led solutions, and socio-cultural factors (Russia, Togo, G77, GDJF).

Areas Needing Development

- Dedicated focus on **gender digital divide** (EU, UK, UN Women).
- Explicit mention of **groups at risk of exclusion** (persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, migrants) to ensure structural barriers hindering digital inclusion are better addressed (G77, Guatemala, Costa Rica, OHCHR, GDRC-WSIS).
- **Funding, capacity building and cooperation mechanisms** need to be developed to address asymmetries (Costa Rica, UNGIS, UNESCO).

3. Human Rights

Areas of Agreement

- Amongst those which reference human rights, broad reaffirmation of the **application of international human rights law online** and the relevance of **guaranteeing human rights** to the achievement of the WSIS goals.
- Agreement on the need for additional references to **human rights frameworks** or methodologies.
- Even where human rights are not explicitly mentioned, many actors point to specific **groups of people** whose rights may be harmed by technology.

Areas of Disagreement

- Human rights is not referenced or discussed by some actors.
- While many understand human rights as **a state duty** to protect individuals, some emphasise **state sovereignty and non-interference** in domestic affairs (Russia, Cuba, G77).
- Some states call for safeguards against **shutdowns, surveillance, censorship** (EU, UK, GDRC-WSIS).

Areas Needing Development

- Work is needed to elaborate how a **formal role** could be developed for **OHCHR** in WSIS (Canada/Australia, Switzerland, OHCHR, GDRC-WSIS).
- Need to ensure the integration of the **UNGPs, human rights due diligence, and accountability frameworks** into WSIS (EU, OHCHR, UK, GDRC-WSIS).
- Integration of human rights into **UNGIS and Action Lines** (Switzerland, OHCHR).

4. Private Sector Accountability

Areas of Agreement

- **Private sector** recognised as **playing a central role** in digital transformation.
- Where actors mention private sector responsibilities, the need for **guardrails, governance or legislation** is highlighted, either to ensure an **enabling environment for business or to enforce businesses' responsibilities**.
- Broad agreement between some actors that **market dynamics impact inclusivity and equity**, either positively or negatively.

Areas of Disagreement

- Some actors stress that **market concentration and monopolistic practices** are undermining equity (EU, G77, OHCHR, GDJF).
- Some (UK, Canada/Australia, ICC) emphasise the need for **enabling investment and innovation environments**.
- Russia/Cuba frame the **private sector as exploitative/neo-colonial**.

Areas Needing Development

- Proposals for WSIS to address **competition frameworks and fair taxation** (UK, India), albeit with differing perspectives, may arise during negotiations.
- **Corporate accountability for human rights impacts** (OHCHR, EU) should be better reflected.
- Innovative mechanisms such as **taxation on big tech revenues** to fund inclusion (Togo, Cuba).

5. AI & Data Governance

Areas of Agreement

- Widespread recognition of **AI and data governance as critical issues**.
- Broad consensus that it would be best to **avoid duplicating work** on these topics happening in **different areas of the UN**.
- Shared concern over risks: **bias, surveillance, inequity**.

Areas of Disagreement

- Some actors call for **new Action Lines or stronger treatment of AI/data** (Cuba, India, G77, Togo, GDJF).
- Some suggest **considering AI under the current framework** (ISOC) and not duplicating existing text or initiatives from the **GDC, UNESCO, or OECD** processes (EU, Canada/Australia, Japan, ICC, Microsoft).
- Some warn that **AI risks deepening divides** (India, G77, GDJF) while some highlight the potential to **advance economic growth and human rights** (Microsoft, UK).

Areas Needing Development

- Additional consideration needed of **how to integrate AI and data governance** across Action Line implementation.
- Proposals for equitable **data value chains** will be likely to arise in negotiations (India, G77).

6. Internet Governance

Areas of Agreement

- Fairly wide level of support for **aligning language with other instruments** including the WSIS+10 outcome doc and the GDC, and to a lesser extent NetMundial+10/ Sao Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines.
- Broad but not universal commitment to **uphold multistakeholder participation** across all stakeholder groups, with some pushing for multistakeholder governance to be strengthened and broadened to other areas of digital governance.

Areas of Disagreement

- While there is a broad level of support for a multistakeholder approach to internet governance, others (G77, Russia, Cuba) highlight **sovereignty and primacy of governments** in digital policy discussions.
- Others **highlight limits** to the multistakeholder approach (India) and its **uneven application** (Microsoft).

Areas Needing Development

- Greater **institutionalisation of multistakeholderism** is a key goal for many, with some proposals laying out clear visions on how this can be achieved.
- Proposals for concrete mechanisms, for example **Multistakeholder Digital Governance Labs** (EU) and **WSIS helpdesks** (Switzerland), could be further developed.

7. Enhanced Cooperation

Areas of Agreement

- General recognition of the **importance of cooperation**.
- Many stakeholders agree cooperation is underdeveloped, others disagree (ICANN).
- Many actors point out that **gaps in participation in WSIS** remain, some highlighting that this is particularly true for governments and stakeholders from the **Global Majority** (EU, G77).

Areas of Disagreement

- There is a discrepancy in how EC is positioned; some focus on **cooperation between all stakeholders** (India, EU, G77), some on **cooperation between governments** (Cuba), with the IMSB directly referencing this divergence.
- Some countries **call for formalization** of EC (G77) and spaces for **intergovernmental dialogue** (Cuba).
- Others (Canada/Australia, EU, UK) **urge caution** on how this topic is addressed, citing **lack of agreement on the definition**.

Areas Needing Development

- Concrete proposals around **capacity-building, tech transfer, equitable data flows** (G77, Togo) will likely receive further attention, as will calls to further develop EC (G77, Cuba).
- Strengthen the CSTD as a venue for intergovernmental collaboration and establish a **helpdesk function** under UNGIS which would signpost capacity building and funding mechanisms (Switzerland).

8. IGF Renewal & Strengthening

Areas of Agreement

- Consensus on **renewing IGF mandate**.
- Broad agreement on **IGF** as the **central multistakeholder forum** for discussion on Internet governance and digital policy.
- **Intersessional work and NRIs** are seen as valuable by many.

Areas of Disagreement

- Many in favour of **permanence**, some in favour of **extension under review** (India, ODET, NRIs) with Switzerland also referring to the need for multistakeholder input.
- Some actors suggest that **IGF needs improvement** including the **agenda** (UK), a more **binding outcome** (Togo), and the **role of the NRIs** should be strengthened (EU).
- Some actors suggest recognising **IGF's expanded scope** (ICANN) or rebranding as Digital Governance Forum to reflect breadth of its mandate (Switzerland, G77).
- Some actors (Costa Rica, G77, OHCHR, UNESCO) emphasise the need for **greater inclusion in IGF**.

Areas Needing Development

- Proposals for **sustainable financing** (EU, UK, India, OHCHR, ODET) have varying levels of specificity about implementation.
- Calls for a stronger **Leadership Panel** or **MAG** (EU), **stronger/actionable outputs** (UK, ICANN), improved **synergies with other processes** could be further developed (India).

9. Development of WSIS Framework

Areas of Agreement

- Broad support for **aligning WSIS with GDC**.
- Recognition that **duplication should be avoided**.
- **CSTD, WSIS Forum, and UNGIS** considered central mechanisms.

Areas of Disagreement

- Some push to **avoid reopening the framework** (Canada/Australia), some call for a **new cohesive digital governance approach** (G77).
- Divergence over whether the GDC should be **implemented through WSIS** (TCCM, Cuba, G77, GDJF), or whether processes should remain **distinct but complementary** (ODET).

Areas Needing Development

- Proposals for **joint implementation roadmaps** for GDC and WSIS (Canada/Australia, EU, UK, Switzerland, UNGIS, ICC, IMSB).
- **Institutional reforms**: improved **CSTD** (EU, Switzerland, ICC), strengthened **UNGIS** (UK, IMSB) expanded **UNGIS** membership (EU, UNGIS), establishment of **WSIS helpdesk** (Switzerland).
- Linkage with **SDGs, Beijing+30, ODET, and other UN frameworks** (G77, India, EU, UN Women, UNESCO, Togo).
- The WSIS Forum could become a **decision-making forum** (Togo).

10. Follow-up & Review

Areas of Agreement

- Shared recognition of the need for **stronger monitoring and accountability**.

Areas of Disagreement

- Some push for **quantifiable targets, measurable indicators** (EU, UK, Canada/ Australia, G77, India, Armenia).
- Some focus on **Action Line facilitator accountability** (Cuba), while others suggest **member states** should also **report** (IMSB).

Areas Needing Development

- Proposals for **roadmaps with indicators** (EU, UK, India), potentially including **GDC commitments** (Switzerland).
- Proposals for **different types of metrics** include human rights (OHCHR), ethical frameworks (UNESCO), gender (UN Women, IMSB), voluntary benchmarks (Armenia), or mechanisms for WSIS+20 Monitoring Platform (Dominican Republic).

11. Financing

Areas of Agreement

- Widespread acknowledgment of persistent **financing gaps**.
- Recognition that **Global South** faces the sharpest **constraints**.
- **Digital infrastructure** and **skills investment** seen as essential.

Areas of Disagreement

- Divergence over the methods of financing.
- Some (EU, UK, Canada/Australia, ODET) focus on **strengthening existing mechanisms**, mobilising public-private investment, and **capacity building** (Switzerland, Russia).
- Some (Cuba, G77, Togo, GDJF) suggest **taxes** on technology company profits, **concessional financing**.
- Divergence on whether financing is voluntary or obligatory (G77), and on technology transfer (Russia, G77).

Areas Needing Development

- Consult with **international financial institutions** for digital-specific programmes (Canada/Australia, IMSB).
- Proposals for **global funds** for digital inclusion (Cuba, Togo) and funding for **DPI** and **digital public goods** (UNGIS).
- Innovative mechanisms needed, (India) IMF loan conditionalities connected to women's digital inclusion, social impact bonds (Togo), a Global Taskforce on Financing for Inclusive Digital Transformation (GDJF).

Methodology

Data sources

Analysis has been carried out on a sample of submissions to the WSIS+20 process. We analysed 31 submissions from 6 stakeholder groups, as follows:

- **Governments** (16)
- **UN & Intergovernmental organisations** (6)
- **Technical and academia** (3)
- **Private sector** (2)
- **Multistakeholder groupings** (3)
- **Civil society** (2)

All government submissions were analysed. Other stakeholder submissions were selected to reflect a cross-section of UN bodies, technical community, and civil society. Submissions can be found on the UNDESA webpage [here](#).

Disclaimer

Analysis is illustrative, not exhaustive.

It is representative of the findings from of selected submissions only, and not all submissions.

There is necessarily a level of interpretation and not all positions in the submissions are included for brevity.

For further detail, please refer to the original submissions.

Methodology

Analytical Framework

The review was guided by a set of research areas across 11 key issues, and was applied consistently across all submissions. This framework and issues identified reflect GPD's priority topics for analysis. As such, while many of the analysed submissions covered other topics, these were not included in our analysis.

Research Areas

- Areas of Agreement
- Areas of Disagreement
- Areas Needing further development

Key Issues

1. Action Lines
2. Access & Inclusion
3. Human Rights
4. Private Sector Accountability
5. AI & Data Governance
6. Internet Governance & Multistakeholderism
7. Enhanced Cooperation
8. IGF Renewal & Strengthening
9. Development of WSIS Framework
10. Follow-up & Review
11. Financing

Submissions Analysed

Government

Canada and Australia
EU
Switzerland
Russia
Cuba
UK
G77
India
Brazil
Armenia
Costa Rica
Japan
Guatemala
Dominican Republic
Holy See
Togo

UN & Intergovernmental Orgs

OHCHR
ODET
ITU
UN Women
UNGIS
UNESCO

Technical & Academia

TCCM
ICANN
ISOC

Private Sector

Microsoft
International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)

Multistakeholder Groupings

National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs)
IGF Leadership Panel and MAG
Informal Multistakeholder Sounding Board (IMSB)

Civil Society

Global Digital Justice Forum
Global Digital Rights Coalition for WSIS (GDRC-WSIS)



Table of Abbreviations

| | |
|------------------|--|
| DPI | Digital public infrastructure |
| EC | Enhanced cooperation |
| G77 | Group of 77 |
| GDC | Global Digital Compact |
| GDJF | Global Digital Justice Forum |
| GDRC-WSIS | Global Digital Rights Coalition for WSIS |
| ICC | International Chamber of Commerce |
| IMSB | Informal Multistakeholder Sounding Board |
| ISOC | Internet Society |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| SPMG | São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines |
| UDHR | Universal Declaration of Human Rights |





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