

Canadian Stakeholders' Vision for WSIS+20 and Beyond

As the international digital governance community prepares to undertake the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) framework, Canadian stakeholders continue to shape the future of Internet governance and remain at the forefront of global innovation and digital transformation. Over the course of six meetings between January and April 2025, Canadian Internet governance stakeholders participated in ISED's WSIS+20 Informal Working Group to discuss their top priorities for the upcoming WSIS+20 Review. Key priorities expressed by stakeholders included upholding the multistakeholder model and championing inclusivity within the Internet governance space to foster a global, secure, open, and interoperable Internet.

Key Stakeholder Priorities

WSIS Action Lines

The eleven WSIS Action Lines guide the implementation of WSIS and cut across several UN agencies, including the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UNESCO, and UN DESA. Canadian stakeholders identified the following priorities for the WSIS+20 Review:

- Maintain the existing Action Lines – and their technological neutrality -- as they are well suited to accommodate a rapidly changing and evolving digital landscape.
- Use the WSIS to rearticulate the importance of the multistakeholder model in ensuring the Internet remains global, secure, open, and interoperable.
- Articulate how proposed revisions or additions to the Action Lines - such as those concerning Artificial Intelligence (AI)- can be captured and implemented under existing Action Lines, which are intentionally technologically neutral and thus adaptable and inclusive.

Stakeholders acknowledged, however, that there may be opportunities to strengthen the Action Lines, particularly as the text relates to gender, youth, the environment, Indigenous connectivity, and the entrenchment of the NetMundial+10 multistakeholder principles. Stakeholders emphasized that these elements should be prioritized if the Action Lines are opened.

Multistakeholder Model

The multistakeholder model is foundational to Internet governance. It seeks to ensure the Internet remains global, open, secure, interoperable, and a place for innovation and economic activity. The multistakeholder model also seeks to maintain the decentralized, distributed nature of the Internet, which supports stakeholders to have a say in the Internet's governance. Canadian stakeholders identified the following priorities for the WSIS+20 Review:

- Support and defend the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, citing the existence of a global, interoperable Internet that operates through global crises as proof that the multistakeholder model of Internet governance works, and can continue to work under its existing governance model well into the future.
- Recognize that for all its successes there are areas for improvement within the multistakeholder model, particularly concerning participation of a broader range of stakeholders, especially those from the Global South.
- Ensure any improvements to the multistakeholder model are addressed through existing multistakeholder processes and institutions and not through the establishment of new institutions or multilateral processes.

Technical Community Considerations

In the recently adopted Global Digital Compact, the technical community was recognized as an independent stakeholder group given their unique role in the Internet governance ecosystem, enabling the technical functioning of the Internet. Stakeholders noted that it is important that those who know how to manage the Internet's critical infrastructure and services have a seat at the table and are equally able to shape the future of the Internet. Canadian stakeholders identified the following priorities for the WSIS+20 Review:

- Advocate for the continued recognition of the technical community as its own stakeholder group in the WSIS+20 negotiations
- Seek iterative feedback from technical community members during negotiations.

Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

The mandate of the IGF is renewed through the WSIS Review. Its renewal will be a point of discussion during WSIS+20 negotiations, and stakeholders expressed their hope to see consistent, positive messaging around the IGF as the primary forum for discussions concerning the evolution and use of the Internet. Canadian stakeholders identified the following priorities for the WSIS+20 Review:

- Strengthen the IGF by making it permanent, ensuring it is well-resourced (both financial and human resources), and emphasizing the importance of the IGF's National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs)
- Articulate the scope of the IGF as the primary forum for multistakeholder discussions concerning the evolution and use of the Internet.
- Emphasize the value of the non-decision-making nature of the IGF as it protects the openness of the forum.

- Maintain the IGF's name and mandate as it is already well-suited to address current topics and can accommodate conversations on new technologies, like AI.

Meaningful Youth Engagement

Today's youth do not know a world without the Internet, and they will be the ones to shape its future. To evolve and strengthen the multistakeholder model, stakeholders expressed that it will be important to meaningfully engage and support youth in WSIS+20 negotiations to cultivate the next generation of leaders in Internet governance. Canadian stakeholders identified the following priorities for the WSIS+20 Review:

- Advocate for youth to be considered as an independent stakeholder group to ensure that they have a seat at the table in negotiations that will impact the future of the Internet.
- Include more references to meaningful youth engagement and youth IGFs in the WSIS+20 negotiations to emphasize the unique role of youth in the multistakeholder Internet governance space.

Indigenous Connectivity and Community Networks

Stakeholders see development efforts to make the Information Society accessible and inclusive as being at the heart of WSIS. Stakeholders emphasized that Indigenous connectivity and community networks are critical to close Internet access digital divides in Canada and globally. When connectivity is available, everyone can benefit from the Information Society. Canadian stakeholders identified the following priorities for the WSIS+20 Review:

- Advocate for the inclusion of text related to connecting the unconnected, particularly Indigenous communities in Canada and around the world.
- Emphasize the importance of community internet infrastructure and community decision-making processes in creating an enabling environment to connect the unconnected (directly related to WSIS Action Line 6).
- Consider how to incorporate the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into both WSIS+20 negotiations and national policies.

Conclusion

Stakeholders expressed their desire to ensure the Internet is and remains global, secure, inclusive, and multistakeholder in nature. They believe that the Internet's guiding initiatives, such as the those outlined through the WSIS Action Lines, should remain technologically neutral to adapt to

the rapidly changing landscape of emerging technologies. They also emphasized the importance of ensuring that all stakeholders, particularly Indigenous communities and youth, are able to access and meaningfully engage in shaping the future of the Internet through efforts to close digital divides and connect the unconnected.