

TOWARDS WSIS+20:

THE GDC, SDGS AND WHY THEY MATTER TO CCTLDS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rapid adoption of the Internet has delivered widespread social and economic benefits. Still, it has also led to complex new policy challenges, such as cyber security, privacy, and the impact on cultural identity. While the Internet is recognised as a key enabler of sustainable development, significant inequalities of digital access remain. Some governments think only governments can solve these problems, while others believe a multistakeholder approach works best. Historical differences of opinion around how decisions are made and by whom will likely be debated again during upcoming development-focused United Nations processes, including the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20). While these are intergovernmental processes, there are ways for country code top-level domains (ccTLDs) to engage. ccTLDs can also play a role in accelerating progress towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

This overview, provided by the ccNSO Internet Governance Liaison Committee ([IGLC](#)), examines the forthcoming WSIS+20 review, which will evaluate the achievements and priorities of the World Summit on the Information Society, including the future of the multistakeholder governance model and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). This overview also explores the WSIS+20 review's intersection with the Global Digital Compact and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The WSIS+20 review is significant for country code top-level domains, due to their critical role in internet infrastructure and governance.

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WHAT IS HAPPENING, AND WHY MIGHT IT BE IMPORTANT TO ME?

Throughout the remainder of 2024 and 2025, several important United Nations (UN) processes focused on development and global governance are taking place. Decisions made during these processes could change the way the digital world is governed, including the multistakeholder approach to Internet governance.

In September 2024, UN Member States will meet at the [Summit of the Future](#), which aims to reinvigorate the multilateral system and show that international cooperation can effectively address global challenges. Member States are expected to agree on a new Pact for the Future and reaffirm existing commitments, such as the UN Charter and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) were agreed upon in 2015 to address poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. Only 15 percent of the targets are on track, and many are going backward. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for a ‘rescue plan’¹.

Digital transformation has been identified as a key area for urgent action to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. To address this, the Secretary-General proposed a [Global Digital Compact](#) (GDC), as an annex to the Pact for the Future.

The GDC’s objectives include closing digital divides, accelerating progress in expanding digital inclusion, and governing emerging technologies for humanity.

Internet governance forms a small part of the [current draft GDC](#). Still, the outcomes of these negotiations will inform later intergovernmental talks, such as the 20-year review of the [World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\)](#) in 2025.

WHAT IS WSIS, AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO INTERNET GOVERNANCE?

The WSIS was a two-phase UN process held in Geneva in 2003 and Tunis in 2005. Its aim was to build an inclusive and development-oriented information society and progress the 8 Millennium Development Goals, adopted in September 2000 and now superseded by the 17 SDGs. Though focused on development, the WSIS set the framework for Internet governance.

The 2003 phase culminated in the [Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action](#), which articulated a common vision for a digitally connected world and identified areas of activity through which stakeholders could work together to achieve ICTs’ potential for development.

Member States built on this in 2005, with the [Tunis Agenda for the Information Society](#) focusing on financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide and establishing a working definition for Internet governance.

¹ [Secretary-General's remarks to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development | United Nations Secretary-General](#)

This process recognised the Internet as a central element of the ‘Information Society.’ In the Tunis Agenda, Member States agreed – many of them reluctantly – on a role for non-state actors in Internet governance.

The Tunis Agenda takes a broad view of Internet governance, specifying that it is not limited to naming and addressing but includes social, economic, and technical issues, such as affordability, reliability, and quality of service. It also calls for developing strategies to increase global connectivity and commits to working towards multilingualism on the Internet.

One of the key WSIS outcomes was the creation of the [Internet Governance Forum \(IGF\)](#), which was established as a platform for multistakeholder discussion of Internet-related public policy issues. It was first held in 2006.

The non-decisional nature of the IGF and the role of governments in Internet governance more broadly remain a point of contention. This was debated at the 10-year WSIS review in 2015, with Member States ultimately agreeing to reaffirm the Tunis Agenda and renew the IGF until 2025.

Multiple UN agencies facilitate the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines. The UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development, CSTD, serves as the focal point for coordinating and following up on the WSIS outcomes. Multistakeholder input into implementing WSIS outcomes occurs at the annual WSIS Forum.

WHY IS THE MULTISTAKEHOLDER APPROACH BEING DISCUSSED AGAIN?

In 2025, there will be a 20-year review of the WSIS. This will be an opportunity for Member States to reflect on the last 20 years, assess progress towards implementing the goals set at WSIS, including the future of IGF, and decide what to do next.

The Internet has delivered enormous positive social and economic benefits and is recognised as an enabler of sustainable development.

However, its rapid adoption has led to complex new cross-jurisdictional policy challenges, such as cyber security, privacy, data governance, and harmful content. It has also resulted in inequalities in digital access and concerns about the Internet’s impact on cultural identity.

Some governments believe that a multistakeholder governance approach that includes all stakeholders who can help solve these problems is the best way to address these complex challenges and ensure the Internet can deliver on its promise of improving people’s lives.

Others think that only governments can or should solve these problems and that the multistakeholder governance system should change so that governments are the primary decision-makers.

Because the Internet is increasingly central to societies and economies, some governments also want greater control over its governance so they can influence how the Internet is developed and used.

Historical differences of opinion around how decisions are made and who gets to make them are still subject to debate and will likely feature in negotiations on the GDC and the WSIS+20 review.

WHAT CAN CCTLDS DO?

While much of the debate will be taking place in multilateral forums between UN Member States, ccTLDs shouldn't ignore them. Below are some suggestions for actions ccTLDs can take if they are interested in seeking to shape the outcomes:



Stay informed

- Join [ICANN's WSIS+20 outreach network](#) and if you're not already a member.
- Consider joining the Internet Governance Liaison Committee: contact us at ccnsosecretariat@icann.org



Engage regularly with your GAC member and ask others how they are engaging

- Engage regularly with your GAC member and with other identified relevant stakeholders at the national level.
- Ask others in the ccNSO, at ICANN, or other for a such as regional organisations how they engage.
- Join with others to share the load and amplify your messages.



Build relationships & convene events

- Build relationships with the officials responsible for GDC negotiations in their national governments and share your views.
- Offer to introduce them to other technical stakeholders in your community.
- Convene events and workshops with the other national stakeholders to share outputs and relevant documents and to identify and address the different priorities and concerns.



Actively participate in stakeholder consultations

- Many governments will run stakeholder consultations to help shape their positions. If your government is one of these, actively participate and encourage others in your community to do so.



Provide written input to your government

- Provide written input to your government, even if they don't have a formal stakeholder consultation process.



Engage with UN stakeholder consultation processes

- Provide written submissions or register to speak.
- Explicitly indicate your support for the positions of others where you see common ground.



Support innovations in existing multistakeholder processes

- Support innovations in existing multistakeholder processes that will improve our ability to solve difficult challenges, while protecting and promoting the elements that are working well.
- Participate in the technical community coalition for multistakeholderism (TCCM) as an additional platform to strengthen the multistakeholder approach.



Consider how your ccTLD can contribute to the UN SDGs

- Are any of your current activities contributing?
- Share your successes with others so that they can learn from you.
- Ask others about their efforts to advance the SDGs and learn from them.

- Share your initiatives that accelerate the implementation of one or multiple SDGs in official existing platforms, like the UN SDG Actions Platform.