Australian Internet Governance Forum

Adelaide, 23-24 September 2025

Updated 2024 Policy Position Paper

ENSURING A MULTISTAKEHOLDER 20-YEAR REVIEW OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

2025 update and messages to the WSIS+20 Review

The auIGF team has updated the 2024 paper to reflect developments in the WSIS+20 review since last October. Late August, the Co-Facilitators released the Zero Draft of the outcomes of the Review.

Based on the 2024 Policy Position Paper, the auIGF team proposes to share the following messages with the Co-Facilitators, should they be met with consensus at the 2025 auIGF.

These proposed messages are as follows:

- We support strengthening existing Internet governance structures within the UN system, rather than creating new ones
- We support ensuring the continuation, evolution, and adequate resourcing of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to strengthen and enhance its value, efficacy, and sustainability
- Meaningful mutistakeholder processes involving all stakeholders, are essential to improving Internet governance structures to effectively address the challenges of a modern Internet
- We call on the 2027 UN high-level review of the Global Digital Compact to commit to robust multistakeholder inclusion in its implementation, and avoid overlap and duplication with WSIS mechanisms

The following pages are the updated 2024 paper.

Introduction

We, the Australian Internet governance community, believe that digital technologies and the online environment provide unprecedented opportunities for innovation, sustainable economic growth and social wellbeing globally.

However, we also acknowledge that they have given rise to complex concerns that are difficult to address, including cyber security, privacy, and harmful content. Regulation is struggling to keep pace with technological developments and complex social and ethical questions continue to challenge our response. We recognise that no single stakeholder group will hold all the solutions and that complex digital issues cannot properly be addressed in silos.

We believe effective, practical and fit for purpose solutions are best developed via multistakeholder processes, drawing on the expertise of governments, the private sector, the technical community, academia and civil society. The virtue of such multistakeholder processes is that they enable the voices of all stakeholders to be heard, without giving precedence to any one stakeholder group. This contributes to the development and implementation of flexible policies which can most effectively support the evolution and growth of the Internet.

It is for this reason that we do not support the establishment of new Internet governance structures within the United Nations system. Rather we support the continuation, evolution, and sustainable resourcing of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

Section 1: The WSIS+20 review

As we approach the WSIS High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly, on December 16-17, this year, we believe it is important to reflect on the outcomes of the first WSIS process, which emphasised an inclusive, development-oriented and people-focused Information Society, and formalised multistakeholder Internet governance.

We can also highlight the positive results achieved through the multistakeholder approach over the last 20 years, and how it has been instrumental in advancing the vision of building the people-centric, inclusive and development-oriented information society outlined in the WSIS Action Lines.

Digital technologies have been recognised as a critical tool in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which aim to address poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, gender equality, peace and justice.

However, the depth, range and complex interlinkages of the SDGs makes this an almost unachievable goal without inclusive collaboration across all stakeholder groups.

We consider multistakeholder processes for Internet governance and digital policymaking are the best way to ensure an open, free, secure and globally interoperable Internet, and to ensure the social and economic benefits are available to all.

With this in mind, we offer the following input for consideration as the WSIS+20 review process enters its final phase.

Section 2: Reaffirm multistakeholder governance

We recognise the multistakeholder approach is imperfect; however, it offers a level of diversity and transparency that cannot be replicated in solely intergovernmental processes and ensures that decisions about the Internet are not led by individual state-based political interests.

All stakeholders must work together and improve the multistakeholder governance system so that it can effectively address the challenges of a modern Internet.

The UN itself encourages multistakeholder collaboration and has had significant success in this regard, including supporting the establishment of WSIS. WSIS led to outcomes such as the WSIS multistakeholder forums and the Internet Governance Forum.

We acknowledge existing processes and institutions need to evolve and be strengthened if they are to respond effectively to emerging policy issues. We believe the multistakeholder approach is a proven method for responding to the complex policy and technical challenges that will continue to arise in the digital world. Stakeholders should commit to using multistakeholder processes to evolve existing processes and institutions. Any such evolved processes and institutions should themselves be multistakeholder in nature.

We, the Australian Internet governance community, reaffirm that digital cooperation requires a collaborative approach drawing on the expertise not only of governments but also the private sector, civil society, academia and the technical community – and a commitment to a multistakeholder approach to Internet governance and digital policy processes.

Call to action:

We therefore call on:

- The WSIS+20 review process to adopt meaningful multistakeholder processes, consistent with the Sao Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines, providing opportunity for meaningful contributions from the private sector, the technical community, academia and civil society throughout all stages of the review;
- The UN high-level review of the Global Digital Compact to commit to robust multistakeholder inclusion in its implementation, and avoid overlap and duplication with WSIS mechanisms;
- Australia's multistakeholder community to actively and fully participate in WSIS+20 related activities, and to encourage their global networks to do likewise;

- The Australian Government to ensure the full participation of Australia's multistakeholder community in Australia's preparations; and
- We encourage all stakeholders to adopt the Sao Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines and commit to applying the guidelines and process steps in their own digital policy development processes.

We support the continuation of the IGF and its ongoing evolution and development as part of the Internet governance system. We consider it an important resource to build capacity and contribute meaningfully to digital policy discussions.

The IGF is a key WSIS outcome and a pioneering example of multistakeholder collaboration. As a global multistakeholder platform that facilitates discussion and information sharing, it has the potential to develop innovative solutions to a variety of digital policy issues.

The non-binding nature of the IGF format allows discussion of issues in a safe space that is not contentious and not overshadowed or stalled by geopolitics and national sovereignty priorities.

Since its inception, the IGF has adapted in response to changing expectations and has now evolved into a network of structures that now includes Dynamic Coalitions, Best Practice Forums, Policy Networks and National, Regional and Youth IGFs. These various streams target different audiences and, together with its capacity building focus, reaches a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Its flexibility and ability to continue to adapt is one of the IGF's core strengths that will allow it to respond quickly to future digital challenges.

Call to action:

- We call on all stakeholders to consider, as part of the WSIS+20 review, ways to strengthen and enhance the value, efficacy, and sustainability of the IGF as both a discussion forum and a key source of information on digital policy issues beyond WSIS+20.
- We call on all stakeholders, particularly governments and the private sector, to fully participate in the IGF and commit to its ongoing financial sustainability.

Section 3: Supporting the open, global, interoperable Internet

The Internet is a complex and robust ecosystem and its remarkable success over recent decades is centred in its design as an open, interconnected, globally interoperable network of networks combined with the multistakeholder approach to its governance.

Realising the full social and economic benefits of the Internet is dependent on balancing a diverse range of government, technical and civil society interests. However, recent technical, legislative and policy developments at the national and regional level are risking its fragmentation[1] on a range of dimensions. Fragmentation and other risks like Internet shutdowns[2] threaten to undermine the Internet's true utility as a global, interconnected network of networks, putting at risk its associated social and economic benefits.

A fragmented Internet is unlikely to deliver more than a small proportion of the utility which the current global Internet is already delivering and on which we can continue to build into the future. Therefore, minimising the risks of fragmentation, protecting and safeguarding both the Internet's design and its multistakeholder governance arrangements is essential to fulfilling its potential, including as an important tool to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

We maintain and renew our commitment to promoting and sustaining an Internet that is open, free, secure and globally interoperable and to refrain from taking any actions that could threaten the operation of the Internet.

We call on all stakeholders to leverage toolkits such as the ISOC Impact Assessment Toolkit and their F.A.S.T approach, and the Sao Paul Multistakeholder Guidelines, to assess fragmentation risks and enabling users to identify whether a proposal, development or trend could benefit or threaten the operations of the Internet.

Find out more about the event and this paper at https://auigf.au/

[1] Link the Policy Network's latest report defining Internet Fragmentation: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/256/24127
[2] See for example https://pulse.Internetsociety.org/en/netloss/