

# WSIS+20 Stakeholder Consultations:

## Inputs to the Elements Paper

### NetMission APAC Youth | July 2025

1. What are the most important achievements arising from WSIS that should be highlighted in the Zero Draft?

**We would highlight the achievement currently in the “Introduction” section in the Elements Paper (line 5):** “The WSIS process has been defined by multi stakeholder cooperation, recognized as essential for building an inclusive Information Society. Governments, intergovernmental and international organisations, the private sector, civil society, the technical, academia and youth, have an indispensable role in achieving WSIS outcomes.”

**To that end, we would also highlight line 12 in the context of the WSIS multi stakeholder process:**

“Partnership and cooperation between governments and other stakeholders is needed to build an inclusive Information Society and achieve an inclusive, open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure digital future for all.”

The WSIS vision and commitment “to build a people-centred, inclusive and development oriented Information Society” in which “everyone can create, access, utilise and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life”, requires youth participation at every level in the multi stakeholder process.

2. What are the most important challenges to the achievement of WSIS outcomes to date and in the future that need to be addressed in the Zero Draft?

We acknowledge the foundational impact of WSIS in expanding digital access and setting global digital development goals. Yet, two decades on, we — as digital natives — see that the challenges have evolved:

Digital divides persist, especially in rural and under-resourced areas. While WSIS has facilitated major gains in connectivity, youth across the Asia-Pacific region note that digital inclusion remains uneven. As highlighted in the WSIS+20 Elements Paper, *Bridging Digital Divides* (paras. 28-35), key barriers such as affordability, lack of localized and multilingual content, digital literacy gaps, and persistent urban-rural disparities continue to deepen social

and economic inequalities. Addressing these issues requires a rights-based, youth-centered approach that tackles not only access but also relevance, affordability, and usability.

AI systems replicate bias, language exclusion, and regional inequalities. AI has rapidly advanced, particularly in the last five years. However, as highlighted in the WSIS+20 Zero Draft Elements Paper (paras 70-76). However, the concentration of AI development in a few countries has raised concerns about growing global digital divide and bias. Current global governance of AI is fragmented prompting calls for the United Nations to play a central role in shaping and supporting inclusive AI governance frameworks. Several initiatives such as the proposed Independent International Scientific Panel on AI, a Global Dialogue on AI Governance, etc. are underway.

Cybersecurity breaches undermine public trust, particularly in states lacking robust protections. As highlighted in *Building Confidence and Security in the use of ICTs*, (paras. 51-56) of the WSIS+20 Zero Draft Elements Paper, growing cyber threats from data exploitation to gender-based online violence are eroding digital systems. While global frameworks exist, many countries cannot effectively protect users. Trusts cannot grow without strong, inclusive cybersecurity measures.

Youth participation remains symbolic, often limited to consultation without decision-making power. While youth are engaged in dialogue, our input is not always reflected in decision-making. This gap is further reflected in the current WSIS+20 Zero Draft Elements Paper, where “youth” is mentioned only once in the Introduction and not acknowledged as a distinct stakeholder group. This omission signals a lack of recognition of young people’s roles in shaping digital futures. To address this, youth inclusion should be elevated either as a standalone section or meaningfully integrated into relevant areas such as *The Enabling Environment* (paras. 36–38) and *Internet Governance* (paras. 57–64), where inclusive policy frameworks and multistakeholder engagement are discussed.

Recommendations:

- Adopt a holistic understanding of digital divides that goes beyond infrastructure to include affordability, digital literacy, gendered barriers, and access for persons with disabilities and marginalized groups.
- Promote inclusive AI by supporting localization, multilingual data, and capacity-building for global participation in AI governance.
- Establish inclusive, rights-based cybersecurity frameworks with adequate technical, legal, and institutional protections.
- Mainstream youth representation across documents like the WSIS+20 outcomes. Youth must be recognized as key stakeholders with decision-making power in national and international digital policy processes.

*“Youth shouldn’t just be in the room—we should co-design the future.”*

— Bea Guevarra, The Philippines

**Note:** Each of the above challenges is included in specific sections of the Elements Paper, except for the last challenge regarding “Youth Participation”. We suggest the creation of a section devoted to “Youth Participation” in the Elements Paper (see answer to Question 4, below).

3. What are the most important priorities for action to achieve the WSIS vision of a ‘people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society’ in the future, taking into account emerging trends?

**From “Youth Participation in Digital Governance: From Tokenism to Leadership” in Youth Statement (please see answer to Question 4, below for more detail):**

- Introduce monetary support mechanisms (grants, stipends, or honoraria) for youth-led submissions, research, and digital governance interventions.
- Establish a Youth Connectivity Fund or embed youth financial support within WSIS+20 participation mechanisms to reduce structural barriers.
- Create a WSIS Youth Advisory Council (YAC) to support action line facilitators, the IGF, and WSIS-related programs, with explicit and flexible age brackets.
- Clarify youth inclusion in online safety tracks, expanding to cover rights, agency, privacy, and mental health, not just harm mitigation.

4. What additional themes/issues, if any, should be included in the Elements Paper?

Youth Participation in Digital Governance must evolve from tokenism to leadership. Youth are organizing locally and regionally, through initiatives like APAC yIGF, Cambodia yIGF, Philippines yIGF, yIGF India, and many others, yet our input is often seen as optional. For governance to be sustainable, youth must be involved at every stage. In the development of our Youth Statement, we identified the need for co-design roles rather than symbolic panels. There is a great desire of the youth for active involvement and meaningful engagement, and concerns exist regarding the future of the IGF if WSIS becomes more multilateral.

Recommendations:

- Institutionalize youth delegate roles in WSIS+20 and Internet Governance processes.
- Ensure funding and logistical support for youth IGFs and national dialogues.
- Recognize and credit youth as co-authors or contributors in formal policy outputs.
- Introduce monetary support mechanisms (grants, stipends, or honoraria) for youth-led submissions, research, and digital governance interventions.

- Establish a Youth Connectivity Fund or embed youth financial support within WSIS+20 participation mechanisms to reduce structural barriers.
- Create a WSIS Youth Advisory Council (YAC) to support action line facilitators, the IGF, and WSIS-related programs, with explicit and flexible age brackets.
- Clarify youth inclusion in online safety tracks, expanding to cover rights, agency, privacy, and mental health, not just harm mitigation.
- Recognize youth from underrepresented or marginalized groups in high-income contexts (e.g., Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, racialized, or disabled) and support their meaningful participation.

We reiterate our answer to Question 2, youth participation remains symbolic, often limited to consultation without decision-making power. While youth are engaged in dialogue, our input is not always reflected in decision-making. This gap is further reflected in the current WSIS+20 Zero Draft Elements Paper, where “youth” is mentioned only once in the Introduction and not acknowledged as a distinct stakeholder group. This omission signals a lack of recognition of young people’s roles in shaping digital futures. To address this, youth inclusion should be elevated either as a standalone section or meaningfully integrated into relevant areas such as *The Enabling Environment* (paras. 36–38) and *Internet Governance* (paras. 57–64), where inclusive policy frameworks and multistakeholder engagement are discussed.

5. Do you wish to comment on particular themes/issues/paragraphs in the Elements Paper?

**"Artificial Intelligence", lines 70-76:**

We believe in human-AI synergy, driven by innovation with equity. AI is reshaping economies, identities, and services—but its impacts are not neutral. Across the region, we see both promise and peril. Localized AI models in agriculture, education, and healthcare are essential for underserved communities. Youth highlighted the potential of intranet-hosted AI systems (AI deployed within private networks such as schools or companies) for privacy in local contexts, though scalability remains a challenge. Ethical AI demands context-aware governance, not just imported frameworks.

Recommendations:

- Promote regionally grounded ethical AI frameworks.
- Invest in open-source AI with local language support.  
Include youth in national AI governance boards and testing.
- Ensure AI policies integrate intergenerational and Indigenous knowledge.
- Regulate AI across its full lifecycle—embedding safety and accountability from design to deployment.

- Mandate safety-by-design: age-appropriate protections, transparent flagging, and culturally relevant moderation.
- Build regional capacity for low-resourced, multilingual, and low-connectivity areas to participate in AI governance.
- Promote interoperable regional AI safety frameworks to reduce regulatory fragmentation while supporting local adaptation. Institutionalize youth roles in AI governance through advisory boards, co-design, and digital parliaments.
- Center digital wellbeing in AI development—youth must thrive with dignity, agency, and balance.

*“AI is nothing but what you feed it. Bias starts with data.”*

— Soklay Heng, Cambodia

**"Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs", lines 51-56:**

We believe in cybersecurity and trust—systems must earn youth confidence through transparency, accountability, and education. Youth are expected to trust digital systems but are rarely involved in building them. From the 2016 Philippines voter data leak (see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commission\\_on\\_Elections\\_data\\_breach](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commission_on_Elections_data_breach)) to everyday data scraping, breaches continue to erode public trust. Cybersecurity must be proactive and privacy-by-design. Trust in data centers and platforms should be backed by standards such as SOC-2 certification (evaluating security, availability, integrity, confidentiality, and privacy).

Recommendations:

- Create youth-led audits and advisory panels for national digital ID and cybersecurity. Embed algorithmic transparency in public digital services.
- Integrate cyber hygiene and digital rights education in school curricula.

*“Cybersecurity is a life skill, not just a technical one.”*

— Dr. Aris Ignacio, The Philippines

**"Digital Economy", lines 17-20:**

We believe online engagement (“clicks”) must lead to real careers. The digital economy, accelerated post-pandemic through e-commerce, platforms, and digital payments, is a global economic pillar. Yet many youth—especially in APAC—face barriers to meaningful employment. While entry-level roles are accessible, growth is limited without privilege or networks. Digital platforms have enabled some youth entrepreneurship, particularly in MSMEs and mobile finance. Youth raised concerns about “ghost job postings,” lack of transparency in hiring, and a

persistent mismatch between skills and market expectations—exacerbated by gender, geographic, and socio-economic divides.

Recommendations:

- Expand public-private upskilling in rural and underserved areas to build long-term economic pathways.
- Fund internships, fellowships, and mentorships for marginalized youth and those without formal networks.
- Monitor and regulate job platforms to ensure ethical hiring practices.
- Support youth-led enterprises via microgrants and startup programs.
- Address structural gaps through equitable financing, infrastructure, and policies for youth and small enterprises.

*“There are too many junior candidates, but not enough pathways to senior growth.”*

— Sabine Dachraoui, Youth Contributor

6. What suggestions do you have to support the development of the WSIS framework (WSIS Action Lines, IGF, WSIS Forum, UNGIS etc.)?

**Supporting the development of the WSIS framework (WSIS Action Lines, IGF, WSIS Forum, UNGIS etc.) requires youth leadership and engagement.**

We reiterate our answer to Question 2, youth participation remains symbolic, often limited to consultation without decision-making power. While youth are engaged in dialogue, our input is not always reflected in decision-making. This gap is further reflected in the current WSIS+20 Zero Draft Elements Paper, where “youth” is mentioned only once in the Introduction and not acknowledged as a distinct stakeholder group. This omission signals a lack of recognition of young people’s roles in shaping digital futures. To address this, youth inclusion should be elevated either as a standalone section or meaningfully integrated into relevant areas such as *The Enabling Environment (paras. 36–38)* and *Internet Governance (paras. 57–64)*, where inclusive policy frameworks and multistakeholder engagement are discussed.

We would also like to emphasize the importance of Universal and Meaningful Connectivity. In a digital world shaped by AI, misinformation, and platform dependency, universal and meaningful connectivity is not a luxury; it’s a prerequisite for youth participation, opportunity, and protection. Youth recognize that coverage does not equal connectivity, reported coverage often hides gaps in affordability, quality, or usability, especially in underserved regions. Relying on voluntary self-reporting is insufficient, since data submitted by governments or providers can be selective and inconsistent. It is necessary to address affordability and service quality, as binary maps miss key barriers like high costs or poor service. Youth and communities are left

out, with few channels to report real connectivity issues. Monitoring Internet shutdowns lacks true accountability. Transparency and trust in data reporting remain weak, as the absence of independent verification or crowd-sourced input reduces credibility and hinders action.

Recommendations:

- Broaden the definition of coverage to include speed, latency, affordability, and competition, not just on/off access.
- Use user-centered metrics that reflect real experiences, not just infrastructure presence.
- Standardize connectivity reporting with global templates requiring clear, disaggregated data on cost, access, and quality.
- Incentivize equitable participation by tying reporting to funding, technical support, and ITU programs.
- Center youth and community feedback via multilingual, open-source tools to report real connectivity challenges.
- Independently monitor Internet shutdowns using real-time data and civil society inputs instead of government self-reporting.

As Asia-Pacific youth, we are already leading, from developing AI tools in local languages to advocating for privacy rights in our countries. But we cannot lead alone.

**These values must inform all WSIS+20 outcomes:**

- Digital inclusion and linguistic justice.
- Gender equity and intersectionality.
- Climate-aware and sustainable digital infrastructure [Emphasizing WSIS+20 Zero Draft Elements Paper, Paragraphs 25-27. These paragraphs highlight the environmental impact of ICTs, including increased energy use, emissions, e-waste, and the need for sustainability standards and circular economy approaches].
- Youth empowerment beyond representation.

**We call on WSIS+20 stakeholders to:**

- Embed meaningful youth representation in decision-making.
- Design systems that earn trust, not demand it.
- Support youth-led innovation, research, and governance capacity.

7. Do you have any other comments?

APAC Youth organized and led the APAC Youth: WSIS+20 Series on July 2-3, 2025 (<https://nma.asia/apac-youth-wsis20>) as a platform for the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance youth community to participate and contribute to the WSIS+20 process. This initiative was organized by NetMission.Asia with support from the DotAsia (.Asia) Organisation,

as part of a regional effort to meaningfully involve young people in shaping the next chapter of global digital cooperation. Through expert-led discussions, interactive platforms, and open discussions, the APAC Youth co-created a collective vision and set of recommendations to contribute to the WSIS+20 process and the December 2025 UN High-Level Meeting. This statement reflects our lived experiences, policy concerns, and hopes for a digital future that is inclusive, ethical, and youth-led.

NetMission promotes youth engagement in Internet Governance (IG). It is the longest standing youth Internet Governance program in the world. The NetMission Academy empowers youth to engage in the multistakeholder model of Internet Governance for a sustainable, open, and interoperable Internet. Its ambassadors and alumni have significantly contributed to developing the Asia Pacific Youth IGF and global yIGF initiatives, the Asia Pacific Internet Governance Academy, the Asia Pacific Policy Observatory, and the NetMission Digest. NetMission ambassadors and alumni are regularly selected for leadership roles in the United Nations IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), the Youth Coalition for Internet Governance (YCIG) Steering Committee, and in other global Internet Governance forums.