



## A DIALOGUE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE WSIS REVIEW

Friday 9 October

Sponsored by Microsoft

Microsoft Innovation & Policy Center  
901 K Street, NW, 11th floor  
Washington, DC 20001

### Summary Report

The meeting brought together stakeholders from the UN, government, industry, civil society, academia, and other organizations to share insights and perspectives on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the WSIS+10 review process. It enabled a dialogue with key facilitators and regulators on core challenges around SDGs and the role of WSIS in addressing these challenges. The meeting was not designed to obtain a consensus view on any of the issues raised by participants, but was a Dialogue and forum for discussion. This report therefore is presented as an objective summary of the discussion in the various sessions throughout the day.

#### Context Setting

Discussion during this session raised the following themes

- 1. The WSIS review is an opportunity to take stock of progress that has been made in enabling an inclusive information society, bridging the digital divide, and be forward looking in how the WSIS action lines can help to realize the SDGs.**
- 2. Taking stock**
  - *Closing the digital divide:* While many acknowledged the progress in closing the digital divide in that internet penetration has increased and 3+ billion more people are connected, many participants agreed that much more needs to be done to connect the remaining 4.1 billion. A number of participants also acknowledged that internet connectivity is not only a technical issue, but also a social and economic issue, requiring diverse voices to be heard.
  - *Role of ICT:* Some participants noted that ICT has an essential role in enabling the SDGs, both in their realization and in measuring their progress.
  - *Freedom of expression online:* A few participants said that people now have more opportunities to express their opinions and are exposed to more perspectives and ideas, but they also noted that challenges remain.
  - *Funding:* Several participants noted that the Global Digital Solidarity Fund had not been effective in addressing the funding challenges to providing universal access.
  - *Technology transfer:* A discussant raised the concern of technology transfer into developing countries to enable equitable development of the information society, and expressed the opinion that low cost devices need to be made available while corporate patents may pose a threat to open standards.

- *Human rights online:* While some participants acknowledged that the internet fosters global communication and exchange of ideas, others noted that ICTs could be used for government control and repression of speech. Some suggested the Internet Governance Forum could do more in this area. One participant also discussed the increasingly significant role of the private industry in providing platforms for expression, which, it was noted, raises issues of accountability.
- *Cybersecurity and trust:* Some participants raised these as issues that would need to be addressed through multistakeholder partnerships to enable successful realizations of the SDGs.

## **2. Inclusive information society**

- *Focus on the gender gap:* A number of participants emphasized the importance of raising the need for closing the gender gap as part of the WSIS review and in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals.
- *Addressing supply and demand:* In addition to building the infrastructure needed to access the internet, some discussants noted the importance of education, broader capacity building, availability of localized contents, and ensuring wider understanding of the value of being connected to the internet.
- *Global participation in discussions on critical internet functions:* A few participants noted the lack of participation from developing countries as well as a gender divide in certain ICANN discussions. There was discussion on the IANA transition process, and that existing internet domain name registrars and registries are concentrated in the US. In further discussion regarding the IANA transition, it was noted that there was a lack of comments submitted from developing countries and from women. The comments received thus far reflected primarily the views of males from Western developed countries. This same lack of diversity also exists in the technical community.

## **3. Multistakeholder collaboration**

- *Ecosystem of multistakeholders:* Some participants noted the “ecosystem of multistakeholders” in a number of implementation examples, and that it was necessary for stakeholders to work together to address the challenges identified and to produce concrete results – it is not sufficient to issue a statement.
- *Multisectoral engagement:* A central discussion point was how the diverse sectors in this dialogue can come together and contribute different values to address these issues.
- *Diverse voices in technical conversations:* Some participants emphasized the need to bring governments and international organizations such as the OECD into the technical conversation.

## **4. IGF renewal**

- *Platform for engagement:* A few participants noted the growth of local and national IGFs, and the importance of extending the mandate to create a stable platform for the IGF to move forward.
- *Forum for successful initiatives:* Some participants also noted concrete results that had been achieved from discussions that originated at the IGF.

## **5. Linkage between local and regional strategies and broader UN goals**

- *Local and regional initiatives:* A number of participants discussed the need for linkages between broader UN goals and local and regional strategies, especially when international development funding programmes are involved.

- *Local efforts for “human capacity building”*: Several discussants pointed out that local training and empowerment are necessary to enable citizens in developing nations to build and maintain infrastructure.
- *Facilitate public/private partnerships that involve local organizations*: Several participants described how public/private partnerships with local and regional organizations enable development initiatives that are more sustainable as they address real needs and leverage the know-how of each stakeholder.

## 6. Create flexible and sustainable business models

- *Top down and bottom up financing approaches*: It was discussed that top down and bottom up approaches need to be combined and tailored to address unique local and regional investment needs.
- *Multistakeholder approaches to financing needs*: Several participants also noted that multiple stakeholders such as international organizations, private entities and local organizations needed to establish financing approaches that could be tailored to meet local or specific needs. A few participants also pointed out that there was a greater need for collaboration and exchange of best practices among financing institutions.

## 7. Linking the debate back to the WSIS action lines and SDGs

- *A collaborative way forward*: Discussing the way forward, it was noted that stakeholders needed to agree on a positive, collaborative way of working.
- *Move from theory to practice*: One participant noted that WSIS needed to focus on bringing stakeholders together to bridge inequalities in access and infrastructure, rather than spending resources on administration.
- *Celebrate the good work and improve failures*: Several participants noted that good work and success stories should be celebrated and used to expand opportunities; at the same time, it was emphasized that there needs to be assessment of failures to ensure improvement.
- *Set clear priorities*: A number of discussants also noted the importance of setting clear goals and priorities (e.g., some communities and regions have greater needs than others).
- *Establish sustainable business models*: In order to realize action lines and SDGs, many pointed out that initiatives needed to be based on sustainable business models that create incentives for multi-sectoral and multistakeholder collaboration and investment.

### **Roundtable 1:**

#### **Public/private partnerships and multistakeholder approaches in enabling the SDGs and the WSIS action lines.**

- I. *What are some practical examples of public/private partnerships and multistakeholder approaches in achieving the SDGs and the WSIS action lines? Who are the stakeholders involved and what roles do they play?*
  - II. *How do they further enable objectives in national development plans, including national digital objectives (e.g., e-health, e-government, universal and affordable access, etc.)?*
  - III. *What are the challenges and opportunities learned from these examples and partnerships? How can they inform policy development globally?*
- *Room for improvement*: In discussion, it was noted that the past has shown that public/private partnerships often do not work as each party fails to understand the other’s perspectives. Some pointed out that government involvement in internet policy is seen as binary, with governments either leading the way or staying out of policy conversations.

- *Ensure clarity and transparency:* Several discussants emphasized the need for government entities to consider the perspectives of all stakeholders and to be clear about their expectations of the private sector and other stakeholders. It was also noted that both the public and private sector need to be transparent about their interests.
- *Creating incentives for private sector:* Another point raised during the discussion was the need for governments and regulators to create incentives for private sector investment rather than creating obstacles.
- *The public/private partnership and the supply and demand side:* It was noted that policy frameworks need to address both the supply and demand side, not only providing the infrastructure needed to connect, but also education about benefits and value of internet use. It was also pointed out that policy frameworks needed to bring the supply/demand side together rather than treating them as distinct issues. It was noted that these policy frameworks need to address issues related to the gender gap, with one discussant pointing out that it would also allow governments to better reap the economic benefits of the internet.
- *Business models that are sustainable, replicable and scalable:* One participant noted that rather than focusing on economic and environmental sustainability, we need to consider economic, environmental and social sustainability in balance when we talk about sustainability. Several discussants also emphasized that partnerships needed to engage locally and regionally (which is considered more effective and less costly) and link initiatives to global goals.
- *Multilateral organizations play an important role in addressing the supply side:* Discussion also revolved around the role of multilateral organizations in addressing issues such as universal standards and spectrum and reallocation issues. It was noted that they could also play a key role in developing reporting metrics and assessing gaps. Some discussants raised concern that multilateral organizations are too focused on top down rather than bottom up approaches and that they needed to get out of the way when the market works and be cautious not to overstep their mandate and expertise.

## **Roundtable 2:**

### **Sustainable (economic) development.**

- I. *How can ICT enable more efficient achievement of sustainable economic development locally in an increasingly global world? What are the challenges in enabling ICT to achieve this full potential in developing countries?*
- II. *What measures are necessary to ensure sustainable economic growth that is inclusive, equitable, and gender balanced?*
- III. *Where are additional investments needed and how should they be financed? How should development objectives be prioritized and progress measured?*

### **Challenges:**

- *Addressing the digital divide:* Several participants emphasized that infrastructure building is not only a technical but also a social and local issue, and that we need to consider the multiple ways in which voices are silenced. It was also noted that policy frameworks need to address not only access and infrastructure issues, but also create opportunities for “meaningful inclusion.” In regards to the gender gap, several discussants pointed out that girls and women not only needed access, but also equal opportunities for leadership positions in technology. It was noted that digital literacy and affordability remain critical challenges. Another discussion point related to the need for quality content. Concern was raised that initiatives like internet.org prioritized commercial rather than local content and that there is a need for more content which meets local needs.
- *Local and regional development as key issue:* There were some participants who mentioned the need for regionalized SDGs that allow for prioritized investment and flexible funding

approaches tailored to regional needs. Several participants also noted that governments needed to work with local and regional organizations and NGOs to build a “roadmap to connectivity” and that a grassroots perspective needs to be taken to local issues – this was compared with a “regional Marshall Plan for development.” One discussant considered “human capacity building” a key issue, with stakeholders working together to provide training for local citizens that enables them to build and maintain infrastructure. Throughout the roundtable, it was also noted that regional and local cooperation was critical in exchanging best practices and resources. Some also discussed the need to leverage ICTs for local and national emergency preparedness.

- *Improve assessment of access gaps:* Another issue raised during the roundtable was a lack of quality metrics and consistent data collection around access gaps.
- *Importance of holistic information sharing:* Several discussants emphasized the need for a database to discover information, exchange initiatives, solutions and success stories on local and regional levels. One discussant also noted that this resource would make it easier for regulators who have limited time to consider solutions. One example discussed by a participant is the GIP Digital Watch, an effort undertaken by a partnership of the Internet Society, Swiss authorities and the Diplo Foundation.
- *Stronger engagement with financing issues:* Several participants also noted that there needs to be a greater focus on financing challenges.

#### Potential approaches to address challenges:

- *Set clear goals, think globally and engage locally:* It was noted by one participant that there is a need to set clear objectives and prioritize needs of different communities. Several discussants also emphasized the need to engage locally and connect to global goals.
  - *Access as foundation, but conversation should not only be technical, but also economic and social:* Some participants noted that multi-sectoral and multistakeholder involvement was important in bringing different voices to the table. While some considered the private industry as a key driver in building infrastructure and increasing access, others noted that there needs to be greater involvement by governments, local and international organizations and civil society.
  - *Building sustainable “human trust networks”:* Several participants emphasized the importance of grassroots initiatives that allow citizens to train and empower each other around infrastructure building and maintenance. It was also noted that governments and local and international organizations needed to be brought together for funding.
  - *Education as key driver for closing the digital divide:* One participant discussed the idea of a “content creation ecosystem” at university level that encourages citizens to create quality local content. A few participants also suggested a role for coding classes and other educational opportunities for women in preparing them for key technology positions. Another discussant noted the importance of providing better training for teachers and integrating technology issues into the curriculum.
  - *IGFs as forums for regional and national engagement:* Several participants emphasized the need to leverage regional and national IGFs to bring stakeholders together and to allow them to exchange best practices.
  - *Government collaboration beyond “silos”:* It was also noted that ICTs need to be leveraged to bring diverse ministries addressing diverse issues like finance, health and education into national and global debates on sustainable development.
  - *Develop tools for better needs assessment and information sharing:* A few discussants pointed to the need to establish best practices around data collection and the creation of a centralized database for information sharing on initiatives and best practices.
- Financial solutions as key conversation:* A number of participants noted that SDGs could only be realized if they are based on sustainable economic business models. While some participants discussed the importance of grassroots solutions to funding issues, others

emphasized the need to combine top down and bottom up approaches by generating funding from international organizations as well as private entities and local organizations and cooperating with civil society organizations to assess local needs. It was noted that there needs to be stronger collaboration and exchange of best practices among financing institutions.

### **Roundtable 3:**

#### **Cybersecurity capacity building.**

- I. *What are the critical dimensions to consider in cybersecurity capacity building? How can nations develop the knowledge, legal and regulatory frameworks, workforce skills and capabilities to enable sustainable and secure development in the digital age?*
- II. *What are examples of successful proactive and reactive collaborations to address cybersecurity challenges, either nationally, regionally, or globally; and within and across sectors?*
- III. *What initial concrete steps can be taken to address cybersecurity capacity challenges globally in the years ahead? Which of these would benefit from a multi-stakeholder approach?*

- *Different interpretations create tension:* It was noted that cybersecurity capacity building means different things to different stakeholders, which can create tension.
- *Issue of lack of trust and data security:* Some discussants raised concerns that greater cybersecurity capacity can only be achieved if governments and companies consent to greater transparency and information sharing, which they are often reluctant to do.
- *Reward rather than punish private actors:* One approach to cybersecurity capacity building of private companies discussed during the roundtable was the creation of incentives that reward companies for positive initiatives such as adopting state-of-the-art cybersecurity rather than creating laws/regulations that punish them for cybersecurity violations. A few participants discussed tax breaks as a possible incentive, but several discussants disagreed with this suggestion.
- *Training/education around cybersecurity on an individual level:* It was noted that basic training in cybersecurity needed to start at a young age. Some participants mentioned the possibility of creating incentives for young people to learn about data security and ethics around information sharing. In this context, some discussants also noted the importance of “cohort ethics” and teaching people skills around ethical online behaviour. Other discussion points revolved around the need for educating teachers as well as vocational skills training on cybersecurity. It was noted that many educational efforts around cybersecurity focus on Master’s and Ph.D. level, but there is also a growing need for mid-level employees such as technicians and system administrators to be trained. Participants also emphasized the role of community colleges in educating the next generation of the cybersecurity workforce.
- *Government collaboration beyond “silos”:* Another issue raised by some discussants was the need for government agencies to collaborate beyond “silos” to establish best practices around cybersecurity and better align goals. There were a few participants who also discussed the need for best-practice frameworks for local guidance and ways to assess the maturity of a nation’s cybersecurity capacity (one participant pointed to the Oxford Martin School’s Global Cyber Security Capacity Centre’s cybersecurity dimensions as an example).

#### **Conclusion: How can the WSIS action lines help to realize the SDGs?**

- *Practice what’s in theory:* Concluding the meeting, one participant emphasized the importance of better practicing what’s in theory. It was noted that the early vision of WSIS needs to be revisited and that a way had to be found to connect the 54% who are still not connected. One participant also pointed out that the WSIS multistakeholder model serves as a good example for other UN summits.

- *Think globally, engage locally and regionally:* While several participants emphasized the need to think globally, it was noted that solutions also have to be local and regional. Again, it was pointed out that we need to understand that digital divide issues are not only technical, but also social, economic and political in nature.
- *Reenergize the IGF:* One participant noted that results of discussions at the IGF needed to be better leveraged.
- *Develop better tools for needs assessment and information sharing:* Several participants re-emphasized the importance of better data tracking and reporting and a centralized database on best practices and initiatives.

*Focus on sustainable, scalable and replicable initiatives:* Concluding remarks also noted the importance of sustainable, scalable and replicable initiatives rather than a focus on pilot projects.