International Chamber of Commerce input to the ITU CWG-Internet Consultation: The developmental aspects to strengthen the Internet

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# **SUMMARY**

*This will form part of the Compilation Document that will be used as the basis of the discussions during the Online Open Consultation meeting. Kindly note that this will also form a part of the report of the Open Consultation that is submitted to CWG-Internet. (1-3 paragraphs)*

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) believes in the power of the Internet to create positive, lasting and inclusive socio-economic impact. This potential can only be fully realised if the fundamental nature of the Internet as an open, interconnected, and interoperable network of networks is maintained.

Promoting international multistakeholder cooperation on Internet-related public policy issues is vital for unlocking the full potential of the Internet, ICTs and digital technologies. To achieve this, a few considerations must be put in place. ICC encourages policy makers to:

* Create policies that facilitate investment across the digital value chain
* Improve digital infrastructure and its use
* Foster trust in data and digital technologies
* Ground policies in evidence and data
* Embrace multistakeholder policymaking
* Foster international cooperation

Ongoing processes discussing Internet related public policies should provide guidance on how to build such enabling environments and ensure meaningful multistakeholder input.

# **RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS**

1. **How relevant multilateral and multi-stakeholder processes, including but not limited to UN-based processes such as Summit of the Future, WSIS+20 and the IGF, could address aspects related to Internet development?**

As the institutional representative of 45 million businesses in over 170 countries, ICC considers Internet governance to be critical for the promotion of international trade, economic development, and innovation. A whole, open, interoperable and interconnected Internet is crucial for supporting business operations worldwide, and a prerequisite to the effective functioning of public services, including healthcare, and education.

When effectively harnessed, information and communication technologies (ICT) and digital technologies serve as powerful catalysts for innovation, competitiveness, sustainable and inclusive digital transformation, and as tools for social, cultural, and economic empowerment for all. This potential can only be fully realised if the fundamental nature of the Internet as an open, interconnected, and interoperable network of networks is maintained.

The very nature of the global Internet as an interoperable and interconnected network of networks, necessitates an effective multistakeholder governance model to be at its core. This includes continued efforts by all stakeholders - individually and collectively - to address Internet-related issues and the promotion of greater cooperation among organisations. Such cooperation should be guided by the objectives of information sharing and awareness raising and where appropriate, coherence among work programmes.

The outcomes of World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), sealed by the Tunis Agenda, have been, over the past two decades, guiding efforts to create and sustain an open and inclusive Information Society. In collaboration with governments, civil society, businesses, the technical and academic communities and international organizations, the goal has been to unlock the full potential of ICTs, the Internet and digital technologies and ensure that no one is left behind.

As the Internet and its core technologies continued to evolve, multistakeholder collaboration continued to bear fruit, fostering partnerships that enable populations to benefit from meaningful connectivity, including cutting-edge infrastructure, state-of-the-art digital services and capacity-building initiatives.

Despite this progress, recent developments continue to show that the multistakeholder model is not embraced or considered by all. As we approach the WSIS+20 review and look ahead to the next chapter, it is crucial to maintain and leverage the important lessons and decisions reached from the WSIS process.

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF), amongst the key outcomes of the WSIS, has been a pioneering example and an enabler of bottom-up discussions among all stakeholders, allowing them to share their knowledge and expertise, thus inspiring the co-creation of interoperable policy approaches, that reap the benefits that the Internet and, more broadly, digital environment have to offer.

The unique convening role of the IGF is a central asset to be leveraged in addressing the challenges towards Internet development, and the implementation of the WSIS vision going forward.

In its nearly 20 years of operation, the IGF has not only advanced diverse and critical thinking but has also been successful at building community. The global IGF and its many national and regional initiatives (NRIs) have propagated cooperation and improved technical knowledge. They have brought together different stakeholders - nationally, regionally and globally - to share information and progress on their respective work, address policy matters in an open setting among a wide range of organizations and stakeholders, and produce intersessional output in the forms of best practice material and policy insights focused on a question or challenge. It is therefore crucial to renew and strengthen the mandate of the IGF as a vehicle towards interoperable policy approaches in Internet and digital governance, that meet the diverse needs of everyone, everywhere.

The objectives outlined in the UN Secretary General’s Our Common Agenda report, pointing towards the adoption of a Global Digital Compact (GDC) at the Summit of the Future, also necessitate a bottom-up governance model fit to promote this culture of cooperation.

In particular, the GDC recognises, and commits to the spirit of the WSIS outcomes, as strong foundations to build upon to enable global digital cooperation. In order to support this, the any potential follow up and next stages in the modalities of the implementation process of the GDC must be inclusive, bottom-up, and transparent, allowing for all stakeholders to meaningfully support and offer their expertise. This not only fosters legitimacy and credibility, but also flexibility to rapidly adapt to changing technologies and issues, and avoid unintended consequences.

At this critical juncture for the future of the development, and governance of the Internet, it is crucial for all stakeholders to commit to its whole, open, interconnected and interoperable nature, and refrain from the imposition of technical or political restrictions that may lead to unintended harms.

1. **What are the challenges and opportunities, good practices and favorable policy environments to strengthen the Internet?**

In recent years, substantive progress has been made in harnessing the empowering force of the Internet as a critical enabler for sustainable growth across diverse sectors, including agriculture, energy, healthcare, manufacturing and education.

Multistakeholder collaboration is a pivotal enabler to this progress, particularly in developing the policy frameworks that allow for continued and inclusive digitalisation, and address the potential challenges that come with it. Key advancements include:

1. **expanding connectivity** to covering 94% of the world's population;
2. **deploying innovative digital solutions**, services and products to expand access to education, healthcare, government services and financial services, expanding social and economic opportunities for everyone, everywhere and facilitating the green transition; and
3. increased **application of the multistakeholder model** across various levels of digital governance, illustrated for example through the steady growth in participation at the IGF, and the global spread of its national and regional initiatives.

The private sector has been a pioneer and partner in driving this progress.

Businesses invest in transformative digital infrastructure, meaningful connectivity, and accessible digital products and services, to bridge the digital divide and unlock green transition.

In addition, by harnessing the power of big data analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning, private companies extract valuable insights to promote inclusivity and sustainability.

Moreover, through capacity-building programs, businesses equip individuals and communities with the necessary digital literacy and technical competencies, preparing them for success in the digital economy.

Business innovation, tied with the collective contributions of the multistakeholder community, are the designated vehicle to strengthen the Internet, and the only avenue that will unlock the potential of ICTs and digital technologies for inclusive social and economic growth.

Despite significant progress, a critical challenge persists: 2.6 billion users remain unconnected. One in three individuals who could go online, do not, as estimated by the International Telecommunication Union. Inequalities in connectivity are closely correlated with location, economic opportunity, education, gender as well as social and cultural norms and governance approaches.

These barriers can be grouped in three main categories: financial, technological and regulatory aspects, as follows:

* Financial barriers refer to factors that impact public and private investment in connectivity, affect costs of developing, deploying or maintaining networks, or inhibit alternative business models to deliver connectivity.
* Technology barriers refer to factors that limit the development or deployment of new technologies or pose barriers to investment in innovation, research and development that would enable connectivity, especially in remote and hard-to-reach areas.
* Regulatory barriers refer to norms, policies, laws and regulations that limit the deployment of networks (especially through new and innovative technologies, methods), disincentivise investments, or inhibit the uptake and use of the Internet for certain segments of the population.

In order to reach their full potential, ICT and the Internet must be accessible, affordable, and relevant to the needs of everyone, everywhere. For this to work in practice, an appropriate mix of economic, technical, and regulatory approaches must be in place.

Policymakers and regulators have a clear role to play in setting up enabling policy environments that are non-discriminatory, technology-neutral, and supportive of innovative business models and the development and deployment of a wide range of technologies, global standards, and system architectures, effectively promoting the value of the entire communications and digital services ecosystem at all its layers: infrastructure; applications and services; and user ability and skills.

In order to achieve the desired positive impact through the catalytic power of ICTs and digital technologies, global business encourages policymakers to:

1. **Facilitate investment across the entire digital value chain:** Policymakers should not only promote, but actively foster both private and public investment, competition, and innovation in the development and deployment of broadband services and connectivity devices, and in enabling technologies, content, applications and services that help drive and sustain adoption.[[1]](#footnote-2)
2. **Improve digital infrastructure and its use:** Modern resilient and trusted telecommunication infrastructure and high-speed broadband networks will be a crucial enabler for all industries and essential for leading the way to a low-carbon society. Allocation and licensing of spectrum should be transparent, fair, economically efficient, technology-neutral, and aimed at ensuring that sufficient licensed broadband-capable spectrum is made available at reasonable cost. Unlicensed, shared, and secondary uses of spectrum should be facilitated, and operators should be incentivised to use spectrum efficiently.
3. **Enable, and foster trust in data and digital technologies:** Policymakers should ensure all citizens and companies can realise the full potential of digitalisation for innovation and economic growth, by setting policies that facilitate the adoption of new technologies and the global movement of data that supports them. Establishing clear rules and enforcing roles and responsibilities in the data processing value chain are the keys to maintaining responsibility over compliance irrespective of locality. Governments should adopt policies to build trust by ensuring that users have practical mechanisms and appropriate control over how their personal data is used. Companies should ensure that personal data is appropriately secured as technology and services evolve. Increased trustworthiness and certainty will underpin innovation, inclusion, and economic growth[[2]](#footnote-3)
4. **Ground policies in evidence and data:** Policies and regulations should be evidence based, transparent and aimed to improve the ease and predictability of doing business.
5. **Embrace multistakeholder policymaking:** By encouraging the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including business, civil society, and the technical community, in policymaking processes, governments can generate policies that are timely, scalable, and innovation-enabling. Multistakeholder cooperation and in particular, public-private partnerships should go beyond project implementation and actively incorporate diversity of views from the first moments of policy creation.
6. **Invest in digital literacy and skills development:** Investment in digital literacy and skills development is essential for future-proofing digitalisation for people, planet and prosperity. Equipping individuals with the necessary digital skills is the only path to fully harness the opportunities offered in the digital economy, leaving no one behind.
7. **Promote international cooperation:** Lack of interoperability across the policy and regulatory environment can create needless administrative burdens and compliance inconsistencies across jurisdictions, stifling the opportunities and progress that can be made. Scaling up the adoption of existing principles and widely used industry standards ensures consistent approaches between countries, enable cross-border cooperation, and creates certainty and predictability for companies to continue investing and innovating. Ultimately, an enabling policy environment is one that stimulates the necessary investments and innovation, resulting in sustaining the services offered through the Internet, over time.
8. **How can we promote international multistakeholder cooperation on public policy issues that are focused on promoting the development aspects of the Internet?**

It is only by combining the dynamism of industry innovation with enabling policy and regulatory measures that we can unleash the boundless potential of the Internet, and realise the desired positive impacts, leaving no one behind.[[3]](#footnote-4) Although over the past decades, significant progress was achieved in building a global, seamless, digital ecosystem to advance inclusive and sustainable social-economic development, barriers still remain. Despite important progress marked since the WSIS process 20 years ago, the multistakeholder model, as the key ingredient to harnessing and promoting the development aspects of the Internet, is not effectively used nor universally embraced.

To address this, policymakers should consider the multi-layered nature of the digital ecosystem and take a holistic approach across economic, technical, socio-cultural, and over-arching governance factors when developing policy frameworks. Multistakeholder engagement is key for the development of informed policies, leveraging expertise from the entire digital value chain.

The IGF, as a unique and pioneering driver of multistakeholder collaboration, enables open, inclusive and bottom-up discussions, and the sharing of experiences, expertise and best practices that inspire action towards a development-oriented Internet. ICC is a long-time supporter of the IGF, coordinating business input into the discussions and benefitting from the free exchange of ideas and informal relationship-building the Forum provides. This has enabled thoughtful discussion and dissemination of best practices for the express purpose of enabling more countries to reap the economic and societal benefits of digital transformation. It is therefore more relevant than ever, in the context of the GDC, the Summit of the Future and the WSIS+20 review, to strengthen and leverage the IGF as the only UN Forum that facilitates the bottom-up and distributed cooperation of stakeholders in Internet governance and digital policy processes, promoting equitable and inclusive access to the transformative benefits offered by the Internet.

The Sao Paolo Multistakeholder Guidelines, adopted at the NETmundial+10 conference in 2024, address the existing challenges to Internet governance and digital policy processes, and provide tangible considerations on improving multistakeholder participation in multilateral processes, consensus building and decision-making, as well as ensuring a better coordination of governance spaces. The implementation of the Guidelines is a prerequisite in fostering collaborative efforts and opening more and better opportunities for all stakeholders to meaningfully participate in Internet governance and digital policy processes, especially in multilateral digital policy mechanisms.

1. See [ICC’s White Paper on Delivering Universal Meaningful Connectivity](https://iccwbo.org/news-publications/policies-reports/icc-white-paper-on-delivering-universal-meaningful-connectivity/) for further information

   and recommendations. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. See [ICC’s White Paper on Trusted Government Access to Personal Data Held by the Private Sector](https://iccwbo.org/news-publications/policies-reports/icc-white-paper-on-trusted-government-access-to-personal-data-held-by-the-private-sector/) and [Policy Primer on Non-personal Data](https://iccwbo.org/news-publications/policies-reports/policy-primer-on-non-personal-data/) for more information and recommendations. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Find out more about how business projects fuel digitalisation through [ICC’s Digitalisation for People, Planet and Prosperity campaign](https://iccwbo.org/news-publications/icc-rules-guidelines/digitalisation-for-people-planet-and-prosperity/) and see real-world examples in the related [case study repository](https://iccwbo.org/news-publications/icc-rules-guidelines/digitalisation-for-people-planet-and-prosperity/#anchor-case-studies). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)