

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2024 SPECIAL EDITION

**WSIS+20: Reimagining horizons of dignity, equity  
and justice for our digital future**



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC),  
IT FOR CHANGE, WACC GLOBAL  
AND SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY (SIDA)

## Global Information Society Watch 2024 SPECIAL EDITION

WSIS+20: Reimagining horizons of dignity, equity and justice for our digital future

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# Are we missing anyone? Indigenous peoples in the Global Digital Compact and Summit of the Future

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This year is when a new agenda for the states of the world will be set, at the Summit of the Future to be held in New York in September, and based on 12 commitments identified in the document *Our Common Agenda*.<sup>1</sup> These commitments are designed to “accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals” and, as *Our Common Agenda* states, “the choices we make, or fail to make, today could result in further breakdown, or a breakthrough to a greener, better, safer future.”

Commitment 7 suggests a Global Digital Compact (GDC), as an appendix to the Pact for the Future to be adopted at the Summit in New York,<sup>2</sup> to improve digital cooperation through specific principles, actions and commitments that will be discussed at that Summit.

Regardless of the numerous contributions that Indigenous peoples can bring to the Summit of the Future, the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and its updates only mention them once<sup>3</sup> in a general mention related to gender. No other reference is made to Indigenous peoples, and there has been no process of consultation

with Indigenous peoples in the development of the GDC.

This is unlike the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process, in which the Declaration of Principles established that: “In the evolution of the Information Society, particular attention must be given to the special situation of indigenous peoples, as well as to the preservation of their heritage and their cultural legacy.”<sup>4</sup>

In *Our Common Agenda*, “Commitment 7: Improve digital cooperation” lists seven items which will frame the discussions at the Summit of the Future:

- Connect all people to the internet, including all schools
- Avoid internet fragmentation
- Protect data
- Apply human rights online
- Introduce accountability criteria for discrimination and misleading content
- Promote regulation of artificial intelligence
- Digital commons as a public good.

I will offer some examples on why the input of Indigenous peoples is needed around these commitments, and by extension in the GDC process; otherwise, we run the risk of excluding important advances on the recognition of their communication rights, and restrain the application of Indigenous values and thinking around technological development.

*Connect all people to the internet:* According to Article 16 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, they have the right to own, manage and operate their own media. So, “connecting them to the internet” is far from accomplishing this right.

1 United Nations. (2021). *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General*. [https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common\\_Agenda\\_Report\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf)

2 <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>

3 “This gender gap has been growing rather than narrowing, standing at 17 per cent in 2019, and was even larger in the least developed countries, at 43 per cent. Similar challenges affect migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, older persons, young people, children, persons with disabilities, rural populations and *indigenous peoples* [emphasis added].” United Nations. (2020). *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation*. [https://www.un.org/techenvoy/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/general/Roadmap\\_for\\_Digital\\_Cooperation\\_9June.pdf](https://www.un.org/techenvoy/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/general/Roadmap_for_Digital_Cooperation_9June.pdf)

4 <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/dop.html>

When we talk about connectivity in Indigenous communities, states should consider establishing the necessary conditions that allow them to develop their own connectivity solutions, for example, by setting up community-led access networks, acknowledging their right to run and operate their own media.

Also, it is important to consider that Indigenous peoples have the right to choose their own development and therefore they can choose to remain unconnected or partially connected.<sup>5</sup>

*Protect data and Promote regulation of artificial intelligence:* In recent years, the principle of data sovereignty has been claimed by Indigenous peoples as part of their rights to territory. This claim is related to how they govern and protect their knowledge, how they share their artwork, and how they manage their cultural heritage.

The way they manage their knowledge and cultural heritage often encounters opposition to frameworks that establish property rights (copyright) but also to the ones that look for the open sharing of data.

Some attempts like the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance<sup>6</sup> have been proposed around this matter, but as some Indigenous activists say, “Data is the last frontier of colonization.”<sup>7</sup>

*Digital commons as a public good:* What many of us call the “governance of commons” is already a well-developed idea in Indigenous communities.<sup>8</sup> This way of organising in their territories has passed to the virtual space and to their media, where they reproduce their way of life. From community radios, to community telecommunications networks, digital archives and mapping tools, Indigenous peoples are innovating in presenting alternatives to govern digital commons.

As we can see in these three examples, Indigenous peoples’ input into both the GDC and the Pact for the Future is essential – and it is necessary according to WSIS Declaration of Principles.

We urgently need to incorporate the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous peoples in these processes if we seriously want to take action towards a better future for all.

5 For more on the right to be disconnected, see: Prudencio, K., & Bloom, P. (2021, 8 June). Keeping it Analog: A framework for opting out of connectivity. *Rhizomatica*. <https://www.rhizomatica.org/keeping-it-analog-a-framework-for-opting-out-of-connectivity>

6 The acronym CARE stands for Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility and Ethics. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CARE\\_Principles\\_for\\_Indigenous\\_Data\\_Governance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CARE_Principles_for_Indigenous_Data_Governance)

7 Hao, K. (2022, 22 April). A new vision of artificial intelligence for the people. *MIT Technology Review*. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2022/04/22/1050394/artificial-intelligence-for-the-people/>

8 Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the Commons*. Cambridge University Press.

## WSIS+20: REIMAGINING HORIZONS OF DIGNITY, EQUITY AND JUSTICE FOR OUR DIGITAL FUTURE

Twenty years ago, stakeholders gathered in Geneva at the first World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and affirmed a “common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society.”

This special edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) considers the importance of WSIS as an inclusive policy and governance mechanism, and what, from a civil society perspective, needs to change for it to meet the challenges of today and to meaningfully shape our digital future.

Expert reports consider issues such as the importance of the historical legacy of WSIS, the failing multistakeholder system and how it can be revived, financing mechanisms for local access, the digital inequality paradox, why a digital justice framing matters in the context of mass digitalisation, and feminist priorities in internet governance. While this edition of GISWatch asks: “How can civil society – as well as governments – best respond to the changed context in order to crystallise the WSIS vision?” it carries lessons for other digital governance processes such as the Global Digital Compact and NETmundial+10.

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