

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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Preface

Valeria Betancourt (APC) and Anita Gurumurthy (IT for Change)

The “common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society”¹ articulated 20 years ago at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is still a promise to be crystallised.

Meanwhile, our world has changed. It would be difficult if not impossible, today, to separate the digital from the non-digital dimensions in all aspects of life. We live in an epoch of heightened inequalities, confronted by enormous emerging and persistent challenges that stand in the way of social justice. Our digital epoch is capitalism on steroids. It is a tragic totem of what could have been otherwise: a world based on people’s power, democracy, pluralism, peace, prosperity and human flourishing.

The emancipatory potential of the digital terrifies governments. And as they turn towards the authoritarianism latent in statist ideology, the imaginaries of WSIS seem to move one more step away from our grasp.

The writing on the wall is clear: the grand idea of the digital that emboldens the powerful and disenfranchises the majority must be dismantled. New meanings of the digital must be recovered, genuine commitments to effective digital cooperation adopted and new strength for resistance reclaimed.

The complexities of our present demand the juxtaposition of a multiplicity of responses

and actions. Network-scale oppression must be understood for what it is, so that a new grammar of solidarity can be built; a versatile repertoire of trans-constituency strategies that will make digital power a force for human rights, gender justice, ecological justice and more.

This special edition of Global Information Society Watch arises from the need to revitalise the vision adopted at WSIS two decades ago by offering analytical perspectives from civil society and social movements. At this critical juncture marking 20 years after the second summit in Tunis, our intention is to pause, look back and raise issues vital for dialogue, deliberation, cooperation and redefinition. As the Global Digital Compact, the Summit of the Future and NETmundial+10 also unfold and shape the directions for the future, we want the call for digital justice to resonate loudly in these processes. Years of digitality defined by institutional and corporate hegemonies have left a gaping democratic deficit in digital technology policy and governance, a status quo that represents an emergency for global justice.

What are the renewed visions of digitality – the bold alternatives that we want to forge for present and future generations? How can we weave together collaboration among the different actors, and a sense of community and solidarity from these visions? The reports contained in this edition are contributions that address these questions; a timely offering that we think can be a beacon in turbulent seas.

¹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/wsisis20-and-igf20-review-by-the-un-general-assembly-2025>

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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