

WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event 2024- Ministerial Round Table summary

The Ministers provided an overview of the progress and challenges in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and emphasized that WSIS has been pivotal in uniting governments and stakeholders in the ICT domain since its creation. However, there are significant challenges ahead to connect the remaining 2.6 billion people worldwide who are unconnected.

The Ministers acknowledged the potential of technology for both positive and negative uses, prompting a call for greater responsibility and accountability from platform providers in combatting online threats. To address the evolving issues that accompany technological advancements, there is a need to strengthen digital cooperation between governments and with the private sector.

The Ministers recognized the importance of WSIS being able to adapt and integrate new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), ensuring its continued relevance in global digital governance.

Key themes from the Ministers' interventions include:

1. **Connectivity and Infrastructure Development:** The development of ICT infrastructure, such as broadband and fiber optics, is crucial for improving connectivity, especially in underserved areas.
2. **Inclusivity and Bridging the Digital Divide:** Ensuring that the benefits of ICT reach all populations, including vulnerable and rural communities, is vital for democratizing access to technology.
3. **Digital Literacy and Capacity Building:** Training and capacity-building initiatives in digital skills are essential to equip individuals and communities to use ICT effectively.
4. **Cross-border Data Flow and Cybersecurity:** Cybersecurity strategies, concerns about cross-border data flow and the role of big companies in data asymmetry are significant points of discussion for advancing the role of digital in development.
5. **E-Government and Digital Services:** Progress in e-government platforms and digital public services aims to improve government efficiency and citizen access to services.
6. **Financial Inclusion and E-Payment Systems:** Leveraging ICT for financial inclusion involves the development of e-payment and e-banking systems, particularly for remote areas.
7. **Response to COVID-19:** The pandemic has accelerated digital technology adoption and underscored the need for robust ICT infrastructure.
8. **Regulatory Frameworks and Policy Development:** Regulatory frameworks are key to managing ICT development, including data protection and AI ethics.
9. **Collaboration and Global Partnerships:** International collaboration, as facilitated by WSIS, is crucial for overcoming challenges and achieving ICT goals.
10. **Technological Innovation and Emerging Technologies:** Innovation and the adoption of emerging technologies are seen as essential for economic growth and development.

The Ministers concluded as follows:

- The interventions shared underscore a collective commitment to harnessing ICT for socio-economic advancement, increasing inclusivity, and ensuring that the digital transformation benefits everyone.
- The WSIS Principles and Action Lines continue to serve as a time-tested reference for global digital discussions.
- The outcomes of the WSIS, namely, the Geneva Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action along with the Tunis Commitment and Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, adopted by the Heads of States and Government, remain the foundation for global digital policies and cooperation. They support our shared vision of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information and knowledge societies that fully respect and uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- The upcoming WSIS+20 review offers a prime opportunity for evolving the WSIS Outcomes to encompass the latest advancements moving forward, integrating new technologies such as AI, and ensuring that the WSIS continues to support inclusive global digital governance and digital development.
- The WSIS Forum has been the time-tested multistakeholder platform for deliberations on digital development policies, exchanging best practices, and fostering partnerships.

- The WSIS should be leveraged for the follow-up and implementation of the Global Digital Compact (GDC). Its established Principles and Action Lines remain central in global digital discussions, as clearly demonstrated in recent declarations.