Civil Society Reflections on the **WSIS+20** Final Resolution

Multitudes

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About Fundación Multitudes

Fundación Multitudes is a non-profit civil society organization founded in 2014, with the mission of reducing the gap between citizens and public decision-making processes. With a multidisciplinary team and an independent profile, the organization works to connect research, advocacy, and coalition-building to influence public agendas, strengthen democratic participation, and promote transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policymaking. Fundación Multitudes advocates for the protection of human rights, democracy, and the inclusion of historically marginalized groups, with a particular focus on digital governance and its social, political, and environmental impacts. Since 2020, through initiatives such as The Women's Observatory on Disinformation and Democracy, the organization has prioritized addressing gender-based disinformation, foreign interference, and information manipulation aimed at undermining women's participation in public life and threats to democratic processes in Latin America.

About this document

This document presents an analysis of the WSIS+20 Final Resolution from the perspective of Fundación Multitudes. It aims to support civil society organizations and actors who are beginning to engage with the WSIS process, while contributing to shared civil society memory on WSIS+20 and identifying key considerations for implementation. The analysis does not claim to represent the views of all civil society actors.

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1. Executive Summary

On December 17, 2025, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution A/RES/80/173 at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20). The resolution is the outcome of an extensive consultation process involving multiple stakeholders, including civil society, and was presented to UN Member States for consideration and adoption by the General Assembly (UN GA).

Throughout the WSIS+20 civil society input processes, Fundación Multitudes participated in broader civil society dialogues and coalition spaces— including the Global Digital Rights Coalition (GDRC–WSIS), the Global South Alliance, the Global Network Initiative, and the Feminist Foreign Policy community —leveraging its ECOSOC consultative status. In particular, during the Virtual Stakeholder Consultation on Revision 2 (Rev2), Fundación Multitudes submitted proposals outlined in our **Position Paper on Rev2**.

While the final resolution incorporated a reference to Afro-descendant peoples—an issue raised by Fundación Multitudes and previously recognized in the Pact for the Future but absent from earlier WSIS+20 drafts—the document still presents significant gaps. These include the lack of a truly intersectional and inclusive approach, insufficient commitments to environmental protection mechanisms, weak recognition of people-centered digital public infrastructure and digital public goods, and limited emphasis on strengthening Global South digital sovereignty.

This document provides a brief overview of the WSIS process and the role of civil society in WSIS+20, with the aim of supporting organizations and actors who are beginning to engage with these discussions and may not yet feel fully prepared to navigate them. It also seeks to contribute to a shared civil society memory of the WSIS process, followed by an analysis of key elements of the adopted resolution and critical considerations for the implementation of the WSIS+20 Action Agenda in the coming years.

2. Civil Society Participation in the WSIS+20

2.1. World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was a two-phase United Nations summit held in 2003 (Geneva) and 2005 (Tunis), aimed at fostering multistakeholder dialogue on the future of the information society, **and its associated challenges and opportunities. The process sought to establish shared principles, goals, and frameworks for implementation in an increasingly digital world.** These processes resulted in four key outcome documents: the Geneva Declaration of Principles, the Geneva Plan of Action, the Tunis Commitment, and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. Together, these documents established the **11 WSIS Action Lines**, as well as mechanisms related to financing and international cooperation.

In 2015, the WSIS process underwent its first review (WSIS+10), which renewed debates on emerging digital issues and assessed progress in the implementation of the Action Lines. Twenty years after its inception, the second review process—WSIS+20—culminated in the adoption of **Resolution A/RES/80/173**. This resolution addresses, among other issues, the future of internet governance mechanisms established by WSIS, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), as well as environmental impacts, social inclusion, digital public goods, and emerging technologies.

WSIS+20 took place at a particularly significant moment, following the adoption of the Pact for the Future in 2024, which includes the Global Digital Compact. Together, these processes aim to reaffirm a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented vision for the internet and global digital cooperation, while also shaping the contours of global digital governance debates for the coming decade.

2.2. Civil society participation

Multistakeholder participation has been a foundational principle of the WSIS process and was reaffirmed during WSIS+20. This commitment was operationalized through a series of virtual and in-person consultations, preparatory meetings, and informal negotiations involving a wide range of stakeholders and UN Member States. Information on these participation opportunities was made publicly available throughout 2025 via the **website** of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). However, effective participation often required significant institutional capacity, sustained engagement, and familiarity with UN processes, which not all civil society actors equally possess.

Over the course of the year, consultations were organized by the Informal Multistakeholder Sounding Board (IMSB), which was composed of non-governmental members of the 2025 Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) and the IGF Leadership Panel (LP). Civil society and other non-governmental actors were able to submit both written and oral inputs to the Elements Paper, Draft Zero, and Revisions 1 and 2 of the resolution. **However, no formal consultation spaces were made available to stakeholders during the drafting of Revisions 3 and 4, limiting opportunities for continued multistakeholder engagement at the final stages of the process. This narrowing of participation channels in later phases reflects a broader pattern in multilateral negotiations, where decision-making becomes increasingly state-centered as texts approach adoption, despite earlier commitments to inclusive and multistakeholder processes.**

3. Resolution: the road to implementation

While the final document adopted by the UN General Assembly incorporates certain language improvements compared to Revision 2, it continues to overlook a number of substantive recommendations put forward by Fundación Multitudes and other civil society actors. These gaps warrant careful attention, as they may limit the transformative potential of the WSIS action lines during the upcoming implementation phase.

Consideration 1: Advocate for the inclusion of Afro-descendant peoples, and women defenders in internet governance policies

In our position paper on Revision 2, we emphasized the need for the resolution to:

- address structural and intersectional inequalities across all relevant paragraphs;
- explicitly name Afro-descendant peoples and racialized digital harms; and
- recognize women and other human rights defenders as targets of gendered political violence.

Most of the paragraphs highlighted in our submission (including paragraphs 11, 12, and 20–23) remained mostly unchanged in the final text, continuing to overlook structural inequalities, intersectionality, and the specific vulnerabilities of Afro-descendant peoples and women human rights defenders. At the same time, a limited number of targeted changes were introduced, reflecting partial— but uneven —responsiveness to civil society inputs.

1.Inclusion of Afro-descendant peoples

Paragraph 24 (paragraph 23 in Rev. 2) explicitly mentions people of African descent as an underrepresented group online, following recommendations raised by Multitudes during the IMSB consultations. While limited, this represents a meaningful step toward acknowledging the deep-rooted inequalities shaping digital policy in the information society.

2.Removal of references to international anti-discrimination conventions

Despite this advance, paragraph 69 (paragraph 66 in Rev. 2) removed references to both the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This weakens the normative grounding of the text and removes explicit links to existing international accountability mechanisms.

3.Removal of references to human rights defenders

Paragraph 77 (formerly paragraph 74) removed the only explicit reference to human rights defenders in the entire document. This omission further marginalizes civil society actors and disproportionately affects defenders facing compounded risks, including women defenders and those from racialized or ethnic minority groups.

Consideration 2: Combat intersectional digital violence, including gender-based violence and disinformation

In our position paper on Revision 2, we emphasized that the resolution should explicitly recognize technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), including sexual and gender-based violence, as well as misinformation and disinformation, as systemic and cross-cutting threats within digital environments—particularly in relation to trust, safety, and democratic participation.

Paragraph 57 (formerly paragraph 56) removed references to sexual and gender-based violence, as well as misinformation and disinformation, from the section on “Building confidence and security in the use of information and communications technologies.” As a result, these issues are now addressed exclusively within the Human Rights section (paragraphs 78 and 79), which remained mostly unchanged from Revision 2.

This relocation significantly weakens the framing of intersectional digital violence by isolating it from broader discussions on digital trust and security. By removing these issues from a core section on confidence and security, the resolution narrows their treatment to a rights-based concern, rather than acknowledging them as structural risks to digital ecosystems, democratic processes, and public participation.

This approach disproportionately affects women, gender-diverse individuals, journalists, political actors, and human rights defenders, for whom digital violence, disinformation, and coordinated online harassment are not peripheral harms but central mechanisms of exclusion, silencing, and political intimidation.

Consideration 3: Reinforce accountability in policies on Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Digital Public Goods (DPG)

In Revision 2, the reference to the **“do no harm”** principle was removed from paragraph 17 in relation to digital public goods (DPG), and this omission was maintained in the final version of the resolution. While the adopted text introduces language stating that governance frameworks should enhance trust in technology and data use, as well as promote inclusion, fairness, and respect for human rights, this framing remains insufficient to ensure meaningful accountability.

The explicit acknowledgment of the **“do no harm”** principle is critical to guarantee that digital public infrastructure (DPI) and digital public goods are designed, deployed, and governed in ways that prevent foreseeable harms, address power asymmetries, and include safeguards for affected communities. **Without this principle, commitments to inclusion and human rights risk remaining declaratory rather than operational.**

This omission has particular implications for Global South countries seeking to strengthen digital sovereignty. In these contexts, DPI and DPG are often promoted as pathways to development and innovation, yet their implementation can reproduce existing inequalities if not anchored in robust accountability frameworks. **Reinforcing a “do no harm” approach is therefore essential to ensure that digital public infrastructure serves the public interest, empowers communities, and supports genuinely human-centered development beyond narrow economic or efficiency-driven outcomes.**

Consideration 4: Strengthen commitments to environmental transparency and accountability

The sections on “Environmental impacts” and “The enabling environment for digital development” remain largely unchanged from Revision 2, and the shortcomings previously identified persist. Both sections show minimal substantive evolution in the final text, particularly with regard to environmental protection and climate-related accountability.

As adopted, the resolution continues to reflect a limited understanding of climate justice and the environmental dimensions of digital development. Effective implementation of the WSIS+20 Action Agenda will require stronger and more explicit commitments to transparency regarding the environmental impacts of digital technologies, as well as clearer accountability mechanisms for both states and private actors across digital value chains.

Meaningful participation of affected communities is notably absent from the text. This gap is especially concerning for Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities, and rural populations, who are disproportionately impacted by extractivist practices, water-intensive data centers, and the growing burden of electronic waste linked to digital infrastructure expansion.
Notably, the resolution fails to acknowledge the differentiated responsibilities of actors holding asymmetric economic, technological, and political power over the Global South. This omission obscures the role of energy-intensive digital infrastructure, mineral extraction for hardware production, and dependency-based development models in reproducing environmental harm and structural inequalities across regions.

Consideration 5: Advance Global South sovereignty and structural support

The final document remains largely unchanged from Revision 2, continuing to emphasize principles such as state equality, multistakeholder participation, and capacity-building for technical and institutional development. While these elements are important, the resolution does not meaningfully address the deeper structural inequalities that shape Global South participation in global digital governance and digital development processes.

The resolution reaffirms the role of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and other multistakeholder spaces, including references to the **NETmundial+10 guidelines**. However, access to these forums remains uneven in practice. **Persistent barriers—such as resource constraints, linguistic asymmetries, and procedural complexity—limit the ability of many Global South actors to engage consistently and effectively, particularly those representing underrepresented groups, including women, racial and ethnic minorities, Indigenous peoples, and other marginalized communities.**

Beyond participation, the resolution falls short in articulating concrete forms of structural support. While it recalls existing commitments under the Tunis Agenda and the Geneva Plan of Action, it does not sufficiently operationalize responsibilities related to financing, infrastructure investment, and long-term support for equitable digital development. **In the absence of sustained resource commitments from actors with greater economic and technological capacity, efforts to advance Global South digital sovereignty risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.**

4. CONCLUSION

The adoption of Resolution A/RES/80/173 is not the end of the WSIS+20 process, but the beginning of a critical implementation phase. The gaps identified regarding intersectional justice, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, environmental transparency and accountability, digital public infrastructure and digital public goods governance, and Global South digital sovereignty risk being overlooked unless they are actively advanced through implementation pathways and WSIS-related coordination mechanisms.

As WSIS+20 moves from negotiation to implementation, the WSIS ecosystem - including the WSIS Forum agenda-setting process, follow-up mechanisms, and inter-agency coordination - will shape how the resolution is interpreted, operationalized, and ultimately prioritized. Civil society engagement therefore remains essential not only to defend inclusive, rights-based, and environmentally responsible digital policies, but also to prevent participation from narrowing as implementation advances.

Finally, implementation will require more than renewed mandates and technical language. WSIS-related work continues to rely heavily on voluntary contributions and uneven capacities across stakeholders. Without sustained political attention, transparent accountability mechanisms, and adequate resources - especially for actors and communities in the Global South - WSIS+20 commitments risk translating into symbolic progress rather than meaningful, people-centered outcomes.

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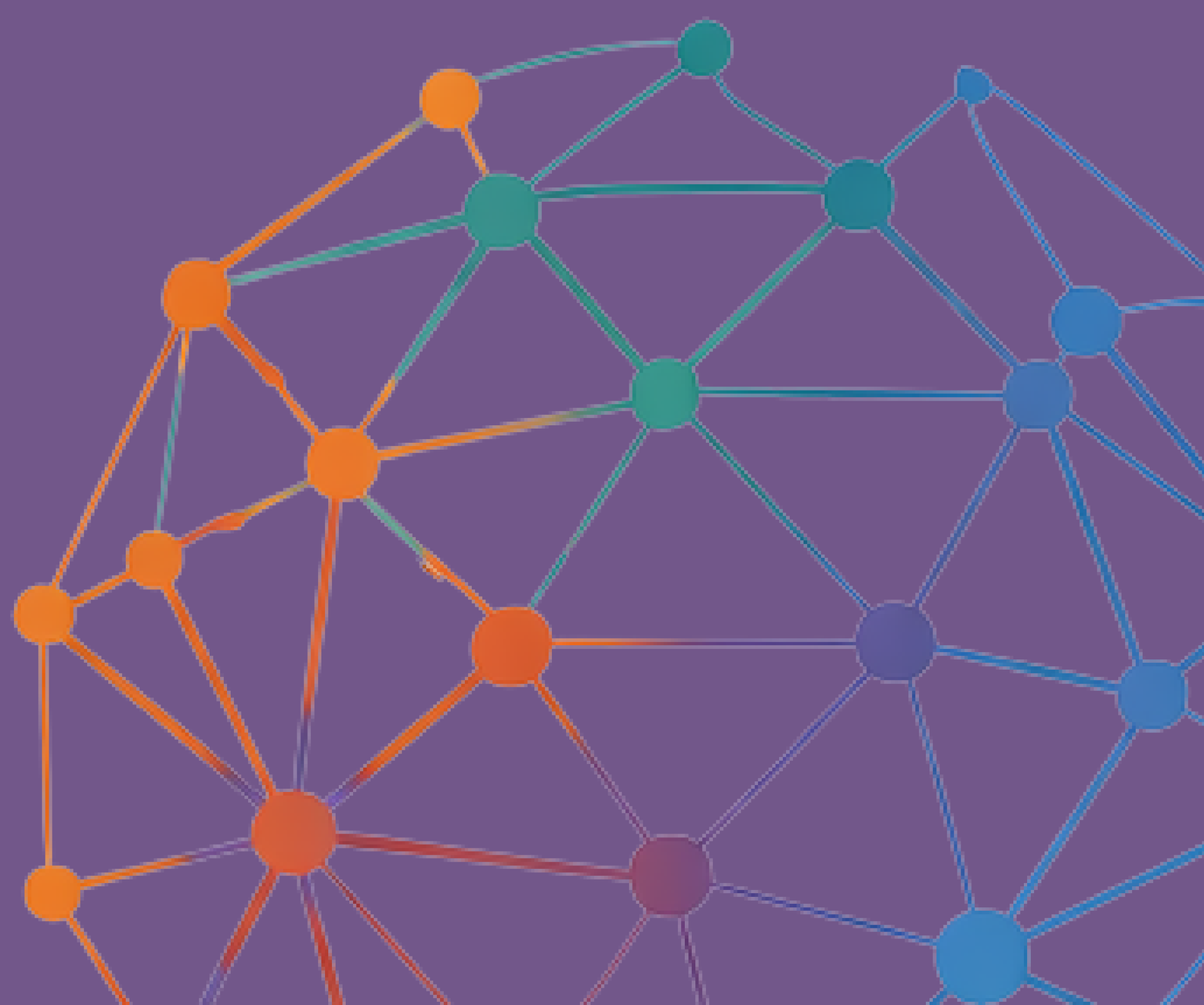
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