Japan IGF 2025

Session: Future of IGF, WSIS+20 and GDC

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Thank you Katoh- San and the organisers of Japan IGF for giving me this opportunity to speak on the topic of the Future of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), the 20-year review of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS+20) and Global Digital Compact (GDC).

My comments will reflect a civil society perspective from a developing country in Asia Pacific. It will also reflect a similar discussion we had last week in India and from the MAG working group strategy.

The WSIS process, represents a complex but essential journey in shaping global digital governance. The 20-year review makes it essential to revisit foundational values and recognize both achievements and shortcomings.

It also presents an opportunity to recalibrate global commitments, strengthen multi stakeholder cooperation, and reinforce WSIS as a cornerstone of inclusive, rights-based digital development.

The Geneva and the Tunis phase of the WSIS laid the foundation for today's global digital policy and internet governance frameworks.

The Geneva Phase resulted in the adoption of the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action, which laid down the shared vision for an inclusive information society and introduced the WSIS Action Lines, practical thematic areas for coordinated implementation, etc.

The second phase which built of the Geneva outcomes and culminated in the Tunis Agenda, addressed key issues such as internet governance, financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide, and the establishment of the IGF as a platform for multi stakeholder dialogue.

The first 10 year review, in 2015 reaffirmed the importance of ICTs for sustainable development and underscored the continued relevance of the WSIS Action Lines.

Over the past 20 years, the WSIS architecture has evolved into a vital multi-stakeholder platform for sharing knowledge, monitoring ICT development, and fostering global dialogue.

It has significantly advanced global digital inclusion and contributed to bridging the digital divide in the last two decades.

Today over 5.5 billion people across the globe are online. There has been a significant increase in internet usage across age groups and demographics, increased connectivity in the education sector, especially with many schools getting connected and a huge emphasis on promoting linguistic diversity multilingual internet and inclusivity in the digital space.

However, while the digital technologies hold a transformative potential, their outcomes are deeply shaped by underlying social and economic contexts. Despite the promise of equity and empowerment through ICTs, the global digital landscape continues to be dominated by few corporate powers.

We are now witnessing new forms of inequality ranging from infrastructural and innovation divides between developed and developing countries, growing gap in access of marginalised populations, lack of control over data and an erosion of citizen rights.

Even states with strong commitments to public welfare face difficulties in protecting rights within evolving digital power structures.

In this context, there is a compelling need to reclaim the original WSIS vision as articulated in the Geneva Declaration, a vision that calls for an inclusive Information society built on shared knowledge, cooperation, and solidarity.

The integration of WSIS values with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains incomplete, and received huge setbacks in poverty alleviation, education, and gender equality, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The IGF, an outcome of the WSIS is the only multistakeholder bottom- up process for discussing issues related to Internet and Digital governance. Today there are over 176 and ever growing national and regional IGFs and Youth initiatives across the world, Dynamic Coalitions, Best Practice Forums, Policy Networks, that not only discuss global issues, but also

regional issues. Over the years there has been growing participation of Global South at the IGF with a lot of civil society participation.

Not only are issues such as access, cybersecurity, gender and human rights discussed at the IGF, but also contemporary issues such as Artificial Intelligence and Internet Fragmentation. In fact, the focus on global south issues has increased. The PNAI discusses issues related to AI with a global south focus.

With this context, we believe in

1. **Renewal and Institutionalising the IGF**

   Institutionalising the IGF by granting it a permanent mandate and stable funding is important.

   Simultaneously there needs to be improvements in the present IGF process in a structured manner. This could include:

   - Establishing effective mechanisms to transmit IGF outcomes to decisional bodies in which Internet-related standards, regulation, and policy are negotiated.
   - Review the intersessional work models to analyse whether these structures are meeting expectations. This will help to identify any gaps that have not been addressed, and possible directions for evolution, coordination, and development.
   - Ensure the IGF can play a key role in the implementation of the GDC outcomes and other UN processes.
   - Work to develop complementary relationships between the IGF and WSIS partner institutions.
   - Create a greater institutional presence for the IGF Secretariat in the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS).
   - Play the role of a "depositary/caretaker" of the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines, which was an output of the NETmundial+10 event.

2. **Renewal of the WSIS Process by evolving it to meet present day needs**

   Even today, the WSIS process remains a critical framework for addressing digital inclusion and last-mile connectivity, especially in

regions such as the Asia Pacific that has diverse socio-economic and geographic contexts.

The foundational Geneva and Tunis outcome documents continue to provide relevant principles such as technological neutrality, human rights, and inclusivity, even as new issues like artificial intelligence emerge. In fact, many of these contemporary challenges can still be addressed through existing WSIS Action Lines, including Action Line 10 on "Ethics and Human agency"

The WSIS mandate needs to be renewed and adapted to address evolving challenges while upholding its foundational values of inclusion, equity, and multi stakeholder collaboration. This includes expanding its scope to cover emerging technologies such as AI, blockchain, quantum computing, and social media governance while promoting inclusive and accessible digital systems.

3. Reduce Duplication of processes and create linkages to GDC or new processes

The WSIS process including the IGF should not be viewed in isolation or considered outdated in light of newer initiatives like the GDC. Instead, efforts should be made to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of global digital governance, reduce duplication across initiatives and create stronger linkages between existing processes such as the WSIS, the IGF, and emerging frameworks like the GDC. Establishing structured coordination among these platforms can improve efficiency, optimize stakeholder participation, and ensure that shared goals such as equity, inclusion, and accountability are pursued in a complementary manner rather than in silos. This would also minimize the burden on a resource-constrained UN.

4. Strengthen the Multistakeholder Process

There is a need to strengthen the multistakeholder process. While it is practiced in different forms, it is foundational to building inclusive, transparent, and resilient digital systems. Though it is not perfect

but still it is the only process that gives non-government stakeholders a right to participate and share their perspectives.

Additionally, even though the WSIS process when decisions are taken is intergovernmental, we would urge it to be open to all stakeholders atleast for providing inputs. In both the cases the Sao Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines can be a good reference point.

I would also like to share that the Global Forum of Digital Justice, a consortium of civil society organizations of which CCAOI is also a member have announced a call for action. We believe it is important for the WSIS +20 review and other global digital cooperation processes deliver on the following agendas:

- Agenda 1. Human rights adequate to the digital paradigm

- Agenda 2. The internet as a global communications common

- Agenda 3. A just international economic order based on the principle of digital non-alignment

- Agenda 4. A sustainable digital transition that safeguards the human rights of future generations

To conclude, the APAC community needs to actively participate, we have lot at stake. Civil society participation in these processes is crucial and should be supported especially from the global south.

Arigato gozaimasu ! I look forward to your questions.