

# **NETmundial+10 Multistakeholder Statement**

*Strengthening Internet governance and digital policy processes*

São Paulo, Brazil, April 30th, 2024

## **Preamble**

This is the non-binding outcome of a bottom-up, open, and participatory process involving people from governments, private sector, civil society, technical community, and academia from around the world. It aspires to strengthen Internet governance and digital policy processes.

# 1. Challenges to Internet governance and digital policy processes

## *From 2014 to 2024: Setting the scene for the São Paulo Guidelines*

Convened in São Paulo, Brazil, in April 2024, stakeholders from academia, civil society, governments and International Organizations, private sector, and technical community, around the world asserted the need for improvements to Internet governance and digital policy processes. The event spelled out how to bring all stakeholders, people, cultures, countries and distinct economies together to solve the common challenges we face. These transcend our divisions and can only be resolved by harnessing the energy of our disagreements, arguments, and hopes to shape a better future for all.

The rapid digital transformation, continuous innovation and spread of multiple Internet-based technologies and applications, including the role of new digital and disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, present us with opportunities and challenges, impacting economic, political and civic spheres. These need to be addressed in the governance of the Internet and digital policy processes.

These technologies open up great opportunities for accelerating human, social, and economic development and tackling inequalities, building more inclusive societies. At the same time, if not properly managed in accordance with international law and international human rights law, they could also bring uncertainties, insecurities, and power asymmetries among and within countries, economies and stakeholders, deepening divides, affecting the civic space and resulting in environmental impacts. No stakeholder can handle these challenges alone.

Internet governance and digital policy processes, more than ever, require unprecedented coordination and cooperation among stakeholders to effectively unlock the benefits of this massive transformation for everyone, everywhere – and to collaboratively prevent and remediate abuses online.

As highlighted in landmark discussions such as the Tunis Agenda and the 2014 NETmundial “Internet governance process principles”, Internet governance and digital policy processes should fully involve academia, civil society, government and international organizations, private

sector, technical community and end users. The named parties are also acknowledged as stakeholders, for the purpose of previous and ongoing discussions.

To strengthen multistakeholder spaces for participation, it is necessary to improve mechanisms for building consensus and producing guidelines and recommendations in such a way that communities' voices have an impact on multilateral and other decision-making processes, so that effective solutions to the challenges we face can be found and implemented.

The 2014 NETmundial meeting was groundbreaking, marking a significant milestone in the evolution of Internet governance. As we approach the 20th anniversary of the World Summit on the Information Society and the Tunis Agenda, and a decade after NETmundial, it is high time to address the lingering unresolved issue: how to help all actors to contribute to a multistakeholder process to create the networked global governance architecture that is people-centered, sustainable and development-oriented, as the networked society demands.

In this context, NETmundial+10 had the focus of bolstering Internet governance architecture, bringing together relevant stakeholders to deliver concrete, non-binding recommendations on how to strengthen the multistakeholder approach as the basis for consensus-building and democratic governance, including in existing multilateral and other relevant decisional fora.

NETmundial+10 reaffirms the 2014 NETmundial principles to guide Internet governance and digital policy processes, proposes procedures to implement them effectively, and deliver messages to shape intergovernmental, national and regional dialogues and decisions on the future of Internet governance and digital policy processes. NETmundial+10 reaffirms the need to build an effective and functioning multistakeholder governance architecture that facilitates an informed, participatory and transparent engagement between sectors, in a multistakeholder model. This is the best way to contribute to the construction of a digital future that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms and fosters progress toward the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the development of inclusive societies that promote peace, prosperity and environmental sustainability for all.

To help address these challenges, NETmundial+10:

- Reaffirms the NETmundial 2014 statement which states that the Internet is a global resource that should be managed in the public interest, in accordance with international law and international human rights law;
- Recognizes the relevance of transparency and accountability for improved Internet governance and digital policy processes;
- Reasserts the continued relevance of the 10 principles for Internet governance processes adopted in 2014, recommending their applicability to address existing and emerging digital policy challenges;
- Offers operational guidelines to help the implementation of these principles in a diversity of situations;
- Provides input into various ongoing processes regarding the evolution of the governance architecture for digital policy; and
- Recommends that the principles and guidelines set out in this document be implemented by all stakeholders at all levels.

This document represents the outcome of a collaborative, open, and inclusive process, shaped by 154 written, online contributions from representatives of governments, the private sector, civil society, and the technical and academic communities gathered through an open consultation held between March and April 2024. The consultation was structured around three main topics: Principles for Digital Governance Processes, Guidelines for the Implementation of Multistakeholder Mechanisms, and Contributions to Ongoing Governance Processes.

Based on the undertaken consultation, valuable inputs were also gathered from more than 700 participants attending both in person and online on the two days of the event.

## 2. Principles for Internet Governance and Digital Policy Processes

### 2.1. The NETmundial 2014 process principles have stood the test of time

#### NETmundial 2014 Internet Governance Process Principles

<https://netmundial.br/2014/netmundial-multistakeholder-statement/>

- Multistakeholder
- Open, participative, consensus driven
- Transparent
- Accountable
- Inclusive and equitable
- Distributed
- Collaborative
- Enabling meaningful participation
- Access and low barriers
- Agility

The 2014 NETmundial meeting adopted a broad set of substantive principles to guide Internet governance. It also adopted a focused set of ten Principles for Internet Governance Processes (the Process Principles), which are a key focus of this NETmundial+10 meeting. These Process Principles are statements of how the Internet Governance system should work, across the broad scope of technologies and public policy matters related to the Internet. They continue to define how to maintain an open and interoperable Internet, which is a core responsibility and central value of Internet governance and digital policy processes.

Even with the rapid technical, social, and economic transformations that have taken place since then, these Process Principles remain relevant and valid in addressing today's Internet governance and digital policy challenges and represent a distinct and important reference for all stakeholders in how the Internet governance and digital policy processes should be shaped. As they have not yet been fully implemented, there is a need for collaborative efforts toward their full application, opening more and better opportunities for all stakeholders to meaningfully participate, especially in multilateral digital policy mechanisms.

The 2014 NETmundial process principles should be the basis of any future evolution in Internet governance and digital policy processes, and it is vital for all stakeholders to fully implement them, as a shared vision of this community.

## **2.2. The “multistakeholder” process principle needs to be fully implemented by all stakeholders**

The 2014 Process Principle regarding multistakeholderism reads as:

*Multistakeholder: Internet governance should be built on democratic, multistakeholder processes, ensuring the meaningful and accountable participation of all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, the academic community and users. The respective roles and responsibilities of stakeholders should be interpreted in a flexible manner with reference to the issue under discussion.*

Each stakeholder has different roles and responsibilities, depending on the issues and stages of specific processes. The distribution of roles and responsibilities between stakeholders is an ongoing (and contentious) subject of debate.

There are persisting concerns that too many governance processes are failing to properly apply the multistakeholder Process Principle. This is especially due to the lack of inclusive and meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders. Including all relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process, on a genuinely equal footing, can indeed be a critical factor to avoid failure.

Multistakeholder approaches to Internet governance and digital policy processes work best when they are inclusive and when stakeholders can identify their own interest in an issue and participate in processes to address it. They succeed when there is a mindset of openness to new ideas and a willingness – by all stakeholders involved – to understand others’ points of view and make compromises to find a consensus.

To gain the most positive benefits from Internet governance and digital policy processes, the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders must be interpreted flexibly and openly. Sectors, organizations and individuals must not be shut out of a given process due to an outdated categorization that was suggested in the past.

That said, a vital component of protecting and improving such processes is to make sure they incorporate the relevant forms of expertise and experience that are required at different stages of discussing a particular issue. Capacity building is essential to improve stakeholders' understanding and ability to participate on an equal footing. This also implies a realistic analysis of (and response to) the power asymmetries between and within stakeholders in a discussion.

### **2.3. Coordination of governance spaces is essential**

Numerous initiatives and processes have emerged to address the broad diversity of issues raised by the digital transformation. Sometimes, multiple processes address the same issues in parallel. This has both positive and negative impacts.

Distributed initiatives on a particular issue can help cover the diversity of approaches and perspectives. At the same time, there is a risk that separate discussions on a specific issue may create incompatible and even conflicting outcomes. There are also difficulties posed for stakeholders to follow simultaneous and duplicative processes, especially for stakeholders from the Global South.

It is important to avoid fragmentation and duplication of fora, to make sure that Internet governance and digital policy processes can be effective. Instead, better coordination between processes dealing with overlapping issues is strongly needed.

The Internet Governance Forum can deliver on this need, by strengthening its coordination and information-sharing roles. It should also serve as a venue for follow up of multilateral digital policy agreements (see Section 4), given its broad mandate. The IGF's open nature, hybrid approach, intersessional processes, connections with local, national and regional initiatives, and inclusive design make it suitable for these responsibilities.

To deliver on expectations for coordination and information-sharing, new working methods may need to be developed, and new financial and human resources would be essential. These could be designed to deliver genuinely improved coordination and information sharing, and also to generate improved outcome deliberation and insight. They could also drive stronger connections between governance processes and the implementation of outcomes that would strengthen the overall effectiveness of Internet governance and digital policy processes.



Any such working methods should strive to avoid conflicts with or duplication of existing processes or creating new burdens, and ensure bottom-up participation on a genuinely equal footing, along with transparency and accountability in such processes.

Effective improvements in coordination will benefit all stakeholders and the ability of Internet governance and digital policy processes to deal with the issues they are addressing.

## **3. Applying the multistakeholder approach and improving multilateral processes**

### **3.1. Improving participation in multilateral processes**

Multilateral processes need to become more inclusive to ensure the meaningful participation of all stakeholders, especially from the Global South. Incorporating diverse voices and multiple worldviews by involving broader stakeholder input can enhance multilateral processes. Better decisions can be achieved and better delivery of outcomes assured through inclusive processes for adequate deliberation and consensus-building, based on the guidelines and process steps described below.

To achieve these gains, all stakeholders should be empowered to contribute in a meaningful way to all stages of a process tackling issues of concern. The appointment of advisory/expert roles and/or platforms adequately resourced should be encouraged, to effectively facilitate and analyze diverse contributions from the agenda-setting phase, during deliberations, and on draft resolutions and texts, following agreed guidelines and timeframes and incorporating ethical and public interest considerations. Similarly, significant investments in capacity-building and education to strengthen each step of the process are vital to achieve effective contributions. It is important that such investments account for the relative power differences between and within different stakeholders and stakeholder groups.

In the spirit of the multistakeholder principles, multilateral processes should evolve. They must share the scope of their work and publish a commitment regarding transparency of the process, including but not limited to a timeline highlighting critical opportunities for participation. As part of that commitment, a regular schedule to inform about their progress – or lack thereof – must be made available, including public access to specific outputs. Documentation of how contributions were made, evaluated and incorporated into the process is as important as the documentation related to dissenting and divergent views. Such mechanisms must follow accessibility standards and provide effective alternatives to facilitate participation in languages other than English.

Robust accountability mechanisms should be part of all multilateral processes, so that there are clear steps and deadlines for the implementation of recommendations. Concrete mechanisms for reflection about the impact of their decisions and the status of implementation of their recommendations are key for continuity. Efforts to accurately document each multilateral

process should be made, including concrete steps to identify linkages with other similar processes.

It is, therefore, essential to foster a safe, trustworthy and fair environment where imbalances between participants are addressed, and civil society, the private sector, academia and the technical community are able to meaningfully participate in multilateral processes. Governments have a key responsibility to guarantee the conditions for securing diversity and achieving robust multilateral processes.

### **3.2. Guidelines for multistakeholder consensus-building and decision-making (São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines)**

We offer and call upon the worldwide community to adopt and use a set of guidelines and related process steps (“**São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines**”) in Internet governance and digital policy processes, that are distilled from existing foundational documents as well as from current good practice and experience. While no one size fits all, they shall help sub-national, national, regional, and global communities to build trust, and to establish and implement multistakeholder collaboration processes and mechanisms, as well as to assess processes and mechanisms that are presented as being multistakeholder, but are so only by their name. As discussed under Section 3.1, they shall also serve as inspiration for evolving and improving multilateral processes.

The following guidelines are a complement to and operationalize the 2014 NETmundial Internet Governance Process Principles. Due to the ever-evolving nature of multistakeholder collaboration, these guidelines cannot be cast in stone and have to be considered as a living document. They need to keep on evolving, both in their practical implementation as in their concrete wording.

We therefore recommend that the IGF is best suited to act as depositary, i.e. caretaker, of this first set of guidelines, and we look forward to the IGF considering its implementation in its own processes and its further discussion and evolution. Such future discussions may cover, inter alia, the prioritization and/or clustering of the guidelines, the development of metrics for the measurement of their application, systems for assessing and holding accountable multilateral and multistakeholder processes, and/or developing further illustrative guidance on their application, such as toolkits, visuals and flow-charts.

## **Guidelines and process steps (“Guidelines”) for multistakeholder collaboration, consensus-building and decision-making**

### **Guidelines**

1. Multistakeholder processes should be mindful of power asymmetries between diverse stakeholders, and empower stakeholders by providing them with the necessary information, resources, and skills to participate effectively, meaningfully and sustainably. Transparency measures should aim for making policy processes known, accessible, comprehensible and actionable.
2. Multistakeholder processes should involve informed and deliberative discussion among stakeholders. Meaningful dialogue is a conflict-preventing mechanism throughout all steps of the process.
3. Multistakeholder processes should strive to treat all stakeholders fairly and equitably, considering their respective needs, capacities, realities, and vulnerabilities. Stakeholders should participate on equal footing, treat one another with mutual respect, recognizing the value of diverse viewpoints and contributions and the different nature of their roles and responsibilities in an issue-specific manner.
4. Multistakeholder processes should be governed by the rule of law and respect to international human rights principles, including economic, social, cultural, civic and political rights.
5. Multistakeholder processes should respect and value the linguistic diversity of participants, and be accessible to all stakeholders, regardless of their background, status, or level of expertise.
6. All stakeholders should share responsibility and uphold accountability and transparency in their respective roles for the outcomes of the multistakeholder process, with legal and political accountability for protection of human rights remaining the primary responsibility of governments, also recognizing the private sector’s responsibility to respect human rights in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
7. Internet governance and digital policy processes should be agile and adaptable to changing circumstances, evolving technologies, emerging issues, and changing geopolitical dynamics.
8. Mechanisms for resolving conflicts among stakeholders within collaborative multistakeholder processes should be in place to enable decision-making.

9. A global multistakeholder approach to Internet governance and digital policy processes should recognize the need for collaborative action across national borders and stakeholder groups, while duly considering and leveraging local and regional perspectives.
10. Decisions should consider the long-term implications and sustainability of outcomes for human rights, and inclusive and sustainable development, as per the Tunis agenda.
11. Capacity-development efforts that enhance the understanding and skills of stakeholders, particularly those from developing countries and underrepresented communities, should be in place throughout all steps of a multistakeholder process.
12. Cooperation and dialogue should actively be sought with other governance fora and processes, in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to share outcomes, best practices and lessons learned.
13. Collaboration processes should be oriented towards practical, actionable outcomes that lead to tangible results and positive changes for Internet governance and digital policy processes.

#### **Process steps oriented guidelines**

**Recommended process steps** for an open and inclusive multistakeholder process:

1. **Scope the issue/s:** define the issue or set of issues to be considered by the multistakeholder collaboration process, considering, as much as possible, all affected perspectives.
2. **Identify stakeholders:** Identify all relevant stakeholders as inclusively and flexibly as feasible, including individuals, groups, organizations, and communities affected by the decision or collaboration.
3. **Engage stakeholders:** Actively engage all interested stakeholders throughout the process consistently and in a sustained fashion, through methods such as public consultations, surveys, workshops, and fora to gather input and feedback.
4. **Share information:** Provide clear and full information about the process, objectives, and outcomes to ensure transparency and understanding among stakeholders, making full use of accessible digital records including related process documentation.
5. **Ensure equitable participation:** Ensure equitable participation of all relevant diverse perspectives and interests, including marginalized or underrepresented groups.

6. **Facilitate dialogue:** Facilitate open dialogue, collaboration and deliberation among and between relevant stakeholders, encouraging respectful communication and consensus-building.
7. **Prepare draft outcomes:** develop draft outcomes for consultation on the basis of dialogues between relevant stakeholders, and consult the wider community of all interested stakeholders over results.
8. **Factor in feedback from wider community:** adapt the draft outcomes taking into account the inputs stemming from the consultation, transparently reporting on how inputs were considered, and the corresponding reasons.
9. **Open decision-making:** use collaborative decision-making processes that involve all the relevant stakeholders in identifying solutions, exploring trade-offs, and reaching agreements.
10. **Community powers:** submit final outcomes to the consideration of the wider community, providing for mechanisms empowering the wider community to react to outcomes that are inconsistent with the wider community interests.
11. **Implementation and accountability in decision-making:** Establish mechanisms for implementing decisions and holding stakeholders accountable for their commitments.
12. **Monitor and adapt:** Monitor progress, evaluate outcomes, and be willing to adapt the process based on feedback and changing circumstances.

## **4. Input to ongoing processes**

As stated in Sections 2.3 and 3.2, several processes are currently under way in the UN context regarding Internet governance and digital policy processes, in particular but not limited to the negotiations around the Global Digital Compact (GDC) in the framework of the Summit of the Future with its Pact for the Future, and the WSIS+20 Review. They include recommendations and potential pathways for the further consolidation of an open, global, interoperable, secure and free Internet and a broader digital policy ecosystem that contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As a unique gathering that seeks to articulate a concrete pathway for strengthening and improving multistakeholderism in Internet governance and digital policy processes, NETmundial+10, as a self-standing event, presents specific messages to these processes oriented to strengthen existing ones, optimize allocation of resources, and ensure synergies, coordination and complementarity. In addition, there are numerous multilateral, regional, national, and non-governmental processes that have inspired and would benefit from application of the principles and guidelines set out in this document.

### **4.1. Internet Governance Forum (IGF)**

The Internet Governance Forum consists of its annual event, intersessional work in the form of dynamic coalitions, best practice forums and policy networks, parliamentary and judiciary tracks, national and regional IGFs, and youth initiatives at all levels. It brings together a variety of stakeholder groups from different parts of the world.

The IGF has been an effective space for Internet governance and digital public policy debates and cooperation, in spite of lacking the required financial resources to meet its mandate optimally. The IGF has the proven convening power and capacity to further explore and evolve innovative multistakeholder approaches to policy deliberation and decision-making processes. If strengthened, it could be consolidated as the preferred space for information sharing and improved coordination among digital governance processes. Its open nature, hybrid approach and inclusive design facilitates widespread participation support.

A strengthened IGF needs to continue addressing challenges and opportunities of emerging technologies, and may need to develop and adopt new working methods that can deliver genuinely improved coordination, insight and information sharing while avoiding conflicts with existing processes or creating new burdens to participating stakeholders and the UN system.

A strengthened Internet Governance Forum:

- requires long term sustainability through increased financial, technical and human resources to be consolidated as a pivotal deliberative platform for coordinating participative debates on Internet governance and digital policy processes;
- can provide cohesion and facilitate participation in the context of a distributed and growing digital governance ecosystem, ensuring more inclusive and diverse participation of under-represented countries, communities, groups and sectors, in particular from the Global South; and
- requires improved procedures to guarantee inclusive, transparent and accountable deliberation, to generate both legitimacy and effective outcomes.

An improvement on the dialogue and coordination between global, regional and national IGFs is also needed, in a way that the discussions and agendas can feed back such processes, aiming at establishing a continuity between them, from a local to a global perspective.

In its evolution, the potential of the IGF to deliver tangible outcomes (such as evidence-based policy recommendations, best practice guidelines and pilot projects to test proposed solutions) in order to build capacity and inform policymakers should be optimized. This will require the commitment and participation of all stakeholders.

The IGF Secretariat, the IGF Leadership Panel and the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, in the performance of their respective functions, have a key role to play in that regard. Mechanisms for collaboration and information exchange with other international bodies and governance fora should be enhanced, as well as IGF's intersessional work. The strengthening of national and regional IGFs, as spaces for the definition of common goals and challenges to inform the global IGF agenda, contributes to tackle governance fragmentation.

The IGF is the process in the UN system that is best positioned to address the gap between discussion and action by building closer ties with other organizations that are central to the functioning of the Internet, but also with multilateral institutions, through ongoing innovation and experimentation within the IGF framework.

The IGF should be renewed at least for 10 years as the foremost global platform for broad-based public participation and dialogue in all Internet governance and related digital policy matters. Through strengthening the IGF we would allow for the UN system to leverage on the legacy and relevance of the model while avoiding further fragmentation of Internet



governance and digital policy discussions. The process for selecting the host country should be further transparent and take into account human rights, inclusivity, accessibility, and equitable conditions for attendance. Free, safe and open participation should be available to all, especially historically excluded groups.

## **4.2. Global Digital Compact**

In order to set the grounds for an "open, free and secure digital future for all", as envisaged by the Global Digital Compact, NETmundial+10 recognizes the essential role of the Internet and digital technologies to build inclusive and participatory governance mechanisms, reaffirming the importance of a multistakeholder approach to Internet governance and digital policy processes and embedding it in its core. The recommendations emerging from NETmundial+10 towards strengthening the multistakeholder approach to the governance of digital technologies and development are a basis to ensure that policies and frameworks are transparent, inclusive, democratic, and reflect the diverse perspectives of all sections of society.

In the perspective of adding value and filling the gaps in the current structures in Internet governance and digital policy fora, it is key that the GDC should avoid creating new structures or processes where existing ones could be strengthened and improved to support in monitoring the implementation and reviewing progress of the GDC. For many reasons the IGF is the appropriate venue to follow up and monitor implementation of the GDC's commitments. The topics set out in the GDC, and driving so much of the focus on digital governance, are already on the IGF agenda and have been for many years.

The IGF with its multistakeholder structures and mechanisms should be used as a space to facilitate implementation, monitoring and follow up of the Global Digital Compact, working in collaboration with other UN agencies such as the ITU, UNDP, UNCTAD, UNESCO and UNICEF, through the WSIS Action Lines, making use of the WSIS Forum and with the UN CSTD providing a platform for intergovernmental engagement in the monitoring and follow up process. The GDC should avoid eroding the relevance of the IGF and the multistakeholder approach in Internet governance and digital policy processes.

Through its implementation oriented to integrate its outcomes with the WSIS process and effective follow up mechanisms building on existing fora, the GDC is an instrument to integrate digital into the acceleration of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, building upon the Tunis Agenda.

The GDC is an opportunity to put digital technologies on track for global efforts that pursue digital inclusion, cross-border cooperation and collaboration among the different stakeholders, the consolidation and effective application of existing human rights obligations, including in crisis conditions, underscoring the centrality of the international human rights law as both a foundation for and an enabling environment to support all aspects of Internet governance and digital policy processes, including through strengthened collaboration with the OHCHR and other UN human rights mechanisms.

### **4.3. WSIS+20 Review**

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) has served as a pivotal platform for fostering cooperation among governments, civil society, private sector, academia and technical community to collectively address the opportunities and challenges brought about by the digital age for technical and public policy issues in digital governance. As the WSIS+20 milestone approaches, a renewed commitment and innovative strategies for achieving digital inclusion and protecting human rights online is needed for leveraging the SDGs. The multistakeholder model, which recognizes the intricate interplay of various sectors and actors to shape digital policy, is fundamental in ensuring that WSIS remains a dynamic process based on the development of global standards and cooperation mechanisms around key digital issues, agile and responsive to the expanding frontiers of new technologies. By building on a strong commitment to multistakeholderism, fostering cooperation and discussing the potential challenges, evolving technologies and trends within the digital landscape, WSIS can prepare for and look beyond the 20-year milestone. Taking this multistakeholder statement into account, the WSIS+20 Review should further enhance the inclusivity, transparency and accountability of the Internet governance and digital policy processes and ensure its attention for environmental sustainability and emerging technologies shaping the digital future.

### **4.4. Other Processes**

We call on the multistakeholder community to promote the outcomes of the NETmundial+10 event with respect to any national, regional, multilateral and multistakeholder processes it deems relevant.