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This submission responds mainly to Chapters III and V, and raises cross-cutting digital issues for Chapters I, II and IV.

Chapeau

The future of multilateralism cannot ignore the pre-eminence of the digital for our collective coexistence. The democratic and distributive integrity of our shared future hinges on the governance of our digital paradigm.

The Pact for the Future and its ideas for operationalizing a new multilateralism must address head on the disastrous consequences of the Big Tech-led model of digitality that perpetuates an unjust world.

The idea of innovation and progress in the epoch of the Homotechnicus requires the recognition of pluralistic knowledges and worldviews for a mutualism that is future-ready.

Recommendations:

1. Underscore the significance of digitalization and its impact on the UN pillars of development, peace and security, and human rights.

2. Recognize the role of democratic multilateralism in addressing the opportunities and challenges of digitalization to ensure digitality enables planetary flourishing.

3. Recommit to the WSIS Geneva principles and the Tunis agenda for digital solidarity.[1]

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Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

The Pact for the Future should:

1. Reaffirm the WSIS+20 review as an opportunity to forge a new path for democratic global digital cooperation

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[1] Especially, para 18 (limits of the market in guaranteeing full participation of developing countries) para 20 (alignment of international finance with developing country priorities), para 21 (role of public finance), para 23 (local infrastructural and institutional capacities), para 25 (role of multilateral development banks) para 27 (the Monterrey consensus and debt cancellation), and para 29 (multilateral, transparent and democratic internet governance and equitable distribution of resources) of the Tunis Agenda.

Governance deficits in the global digital order are hugely inimical for developing countries, debilitating their development potential. The upcoming WSIS+20 review in 2025 presents a vital opportunity to negotiate a new social contract for our digital future.

The UN Secretary-General's [Policy Brief](#) on the Global Digital Compact envisages a "networked multilateral arrangement" that can enable harmonized action on just and sustainable digitalization across various wings of the UN system. The ideal of [networked multilateralism](#) needs a clear separation of roles, responsibilities, and powers of the different actors in distributed decision-making. Otherwise, multilateral policy spaces will be held hostage to a [corporate takeover](#).

Recommendations:

1.1. Reclaim the vision of the WSIS and call out the injustice and extractivism of the mainstream digital economy. Institutional mechanisms for global digital cooperation need to build on the WSIS mandate taking into account emerging realities shaped by a datafied world.

1.2. Ensure the participation of all actors – governments, civil society, technical community, and the private sector – in their appropriate roles and responsibilities in shaping the future of global digital governance.

1.3. Enable meaningful participation of civil society at the table in negotiating a new social contract for our digital future.

2. Establish a new global social contract for data

Traditional approaches to data protection take a narrow view of privacy and are not adequate to the rights of individuals and societies to self-determination.

While data is a critical asset in global value chains, the infrastructural and institutional capabilities to harness data value are [limited](#) to a handful of corporations mainly from the US and China.

Developed countries' push for the hyper-liberalization of cross-border data flows has led to a *fait accompli*, with developing countries getting assimilated into an unequal digital economy.

Big corporations who amass data resources subvert the Intellectual Property (IP) regime. Free-riding on and enclosing publicly available data, and denying data accessibility for public interest innovation, they seek refuge in a finders-keepers (il)logic.

As UNCTAD [notes,](#) "a fair and just digital economy requires an overarching paradigm shift from private data contracts to social contracts, transcending purely market considerations."

Recommendations:

2.1. Constitute a high level Working Group that reports to the General Assembly to recommend a binding global governance regime for data – [straddling](#) economic and non-economic issues; operating from the principles of data flows with human rights and equity; and recognizing development as inextricably linked to people's data sovereignty.

2.2. Mandate ex-ante human rights assessments – with particular [attention](#) to 'do-no-harm by design' and 'data privacy and security principles' – in global alliances for digital public goods.

2.3. Reform the IP regime to address challenges of data extractivism through (i) strong institutional safeguards to protect social sector data, (ii) conditional access to public domain data, with purpose limitation and clear sunset clauses; and (iii) [reciprocity guarantees](#) in common data pools.

2.4. Reorient digital trade rules to balance cross-border data flows with imperatives of equity, human rights, and sovereignty; local data protection regulation; and security of data.

2.5. Institute taxation of revenues that Big Tech generates from the societal data commons.

3. Invest in global to local institutional frameworks for the development of public digital innovation ecosystems

Platform-based ecosystems are a new [powerful nexus](#) of innovation and entrepreneurship, and have the potential to stimulate economic and social development.

However, the Big Tech-led model has usurped the technological commons, proprietized precious productive resources (including the internet, data, AI), and prevented the emergence of vibrant, digitally-enabled knowledge systems that generate public and social value.

Squeezing the laboring class and cementing racial and gender hierarchies, the dominant digital economy is antithetical to the very propensity of digital technologies for supporting democratic innovation and solidarity economies.

The narrative of digital innovation peddled by dominant actors wrongly valorizes a winner-take-all imagination built on the ills of unaccountable financial capital. This erases possible futures based on alternative visions that democratize data value.

This is where public digital innovation ecosystems have a role to play. As [techno-institutional arrangements](#) that enable public agencies, private sector organizations, and community groups/people's organizations to co-shape innovation trajectories, such ecosystems can catalyze appropriate technology adoption, resource optimization, free exchange of ideas, and contextual innovation.

Recommendations:

3.1. Endorse the idea of innovation ecosystems built on a mutually productive interplay of public goods and people's commons to further sustainable, equal, and just economies and societies.

3.2. Envision clear commitments for international public financing, including through ODA and IFIs, for development of innovation ecosystems in the Global South.

3.3. Require States to a) Invest in connectivity infrastructure; platform, data and AI public goods; as well as technical standards and protocols for democratizing digital innovation, b) Undertake public consultations and create appropriate legal frameworks for implementing digital public infrastructure projects and c) Center gender-aspirational design in the development of all digital public goods.

4. Bind global digital governance to human rights and rights of nature

The need to guarantee human rights online, achieve gender equality and protect minorities in the digital paradigm is widely recognized. The viral amplification of violent material on social media platforms requires strict accountability on the part of Big Tech companies whose algorithms drive up visibility for profit. However, we do not yet have a legal instrument or mechanism to guarantee the full implementation and protection of human rights by States and other stakeholders, including businesses.

Addressing structural injustices in the global digital order requires the definition of a new sub-set of human rights that account for the social, developmental and ecological consequences of the concentration of data and compute power.

Recommendations:

4.1. Adopt a binding consensus at the multilateral level to enforce accountability of state and non-state actors to enforce human rights in the use of digital technologies.

4.2. Update the international human rights framework to incorporate, as appropriate, a new class of data rights to protect social, political, economic and developmental freedoms[2] and uphold the sovereign right of peoples to govern their data resources.

4.3. Safeguard the rights of nature associated with natural ecosystems and species inherently implicated in the socio-institutional architecture of digitality.

5. Embrace a supra-liberal framework for AI governance

Calls for accountable AI often sidestep the power imbalances characterizing the AI paradigm. AI-led economic transformation foundationally alters the opportunity structure for countries and communities in the Global South. Not only are they forced to relinquish any claims to their own data to mega corporations, but are also deprived of the means and capabilities to legitimately derive benefits from their data.

The inherent bias and glaring omissions in data sets create distorted knowledge and prevent meaningful representation of the Majority World in the AI paradigm. Marginalized communities and groups including women, racial and sexual minorities, small producers, workers, and indigenous communities are largely excluded from the decision-making around AI, whether in the determination of priorities, design and deployment, or policy and rule-making. The predominant risk-based approach to AI regulation is not adequate to protect human rights.

The dual-use nature and possible misuse of AI technologies in the military domain by state and non-state actors also presents a real threat that the multilateral system has not tackled front and center.

Recommendations:

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2   This, inter alia, will include the right to data access, the right to explanation, the right to be forgotten, the right to be represented (or not) in digital systems, the right to participate in decisions about data innovations, protection against all forms of data discrimination including unfair denial of citizen entitlements, and workers' data rights in algorithmic workplaces.

5.1. Evolve a binding multilateral framework to guide future trajectories of AI design, development, and use with mandatory ex-ante and ex-post assessments of risks to human rights and threats to peace and security; transparency measures that meet a high threshold of explainability; accountability measures geared at harm prevention over redress; non-discrimination objectives/benchmarks; and consultative mechanisms to better inform multilateral AI governance.

5.2. Extend to AI governance the core principles of the UNECE Convention[3] that grants rights to the public, and imposes obligations on parties to the agreement and public authorities, regarding access to information and public participation and access to justice.

5.3. Establish international norms and agreements to ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits of algorithmic systems, avoiding the locking of developing countries into loops of dependency.[4]

5.4. Reject digital trade rules that prevent nation-states from enforcing transparency and accountability regulation on AI services and application providers (such as the prohibition on source code transfer).

5.5. Reform IP regimes and enable exceptions for public interest considerations in access to and use of data sets held by corporations. Licensing systems need to recognize community contributions in the development of AI.

5.6. In line with the precautionary principle, accelerate the formalization of binding regulations on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems and institute a global ban on non-human control of nuclear weapons platform launches.

Chapter V. Transforming global governance

The long-standing crisis of global democratic processes and institutions is exacerbated by the political economy of digitalization and development. Global digital governance is pertinent not only because digitalization is key to the current historical conjuncture, but also because global to local governance in all domains is palpably impacted by the digital.

Today's painful realities of the climate crisis and war are firmly intertwined with neoliberal ideologies and corporate greed underpinning our digital pathways.

The emergence of the US and China as major digital power centers and resultant neo-colonial dependencies – both infrastructural and commercial – for the Majority World represents a geo-political logjam.

Meanwhile, ideologies of techno-solutionism in international cooperation have contributed to de-democratization, a slide-back on democratic principles of governance. New-age philanthropists

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3   On Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.
4   This would, inter alia, entail establishing modalities for sharing of revenue that is being generated by the use of public data by AI, while also ensuring enough access to the training data that is required for AI development.

have normalized a skewed narrative of the development agenda that reinforces the political-economic status quo.

Transformed governance implies a tangible shift in material conditions of people, moving away from cosmetic patchwork driven by interests of those who hold power.

Recommendations:

1. Usher in system-wide changes through participatory, people-centric institutional methodologies for multilateral norm-setting. From a Digital Development Tax to public finance for digital infrastructure and public goods in developing countries, to binding rules for Big Tech (Big Pharma and Big Agri), and checks and balances to contain state excesses in digital society, a slew of changes are in order for a radical tomorrow.

2. Update the WSIS action lines and strengthen collaboration across global to local governance spaces to enable step change that is transformative for the most marginalized.