

Global South Alliance: Position on the Global Digital Compact and the Summit of the Future



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Context

This position paper is the result of the collaboration between the partner organisations, Paradigm Initiative, Data Privacy Brasil, Pollicy, Research ICT Africa, Internet Bolivia, and Digital Rights Foundation - all part of the Global South Alliance. This initiative stemmed from the meetings between members of the Alliance, although it does not represent the views of all of its members.

With this paper, we seek to address some of the pressing issues for civil society in the field of digital rights, highlighted by the experiences of these organisations, considering the UN Global Digital Compact (GDC) process and the Summit of the Future.

In March 2023, the Data Privacy Brasil Research Association (Brazil), together with Research ICT Africa (South Africa), Aapti Institute (India), Internet Bolivia (Bolivia), Kenyan ICT Action Network (Kenya), and Paradigm Initiative (Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Zambia, Zimbabwe), submitted a **joint contribution to the UN Digital Global Compact (GDC)**, being a significant effort. At the time of the submission, the website did not indicate having received contributions from the Latin American and Asian regions.

Among the actions proposed by this Global South Alliance, the role of the State in providing a multistakeholder co-regulatory environment based on principles of transparency, accountability, and supervision of activities and technological development that use data as a public good stands out, in addition to

obligations on the private sector in conducting and handling this data. For organised civil society and academics, we seek a role in monitoring and deepening concepts – to be debated and evaluated in international forums, to have common understandings about global digital public goods that reduce inequalities and create fair conditions for development for all people.

In 2024, members of the Global South Alliance have been thinking collectively about new policy-oriented work at the international level, recognising the need for broadening civil society participation in UN-led processes such as the GDC and the Summit of the Future. Following these discussions, the authors of this paper present the following **points to be considered during the negotiation of the GDC and in anticipation of what will follow after the Summit of the Future**¹.

¹ Ahead of the civil society consultations, several reports from the process and different consultations have already been published and taken place. Among them are the interim report on the global governance of AI by the UN AI Advisory Body, and the zero draft on the Global Digital Compact.

Background

As civil society organisations from the Global South, we are concerned with the global distribution of risks and opportunities offered by existing and emerging technologies. We welcome the process of a Global Digital Compact that will lead towards a new social contract aimed at bridging the inequalities created and exacerbated by technologies while at the same time maximising their opportunities for human prosperity, but must stress that the **Global South has unique needs and priorities for prosperity and development and these needs stem from the unique contexts, dependencies on technology infrastructure, data and its positions in both local politics and geopolitics.**

We believe that many of these opportunities and risks are best addressed through global processes and international cooperation, voluntary collaborations, meaningful and inclusive participation, and genuine global interest not to leave anyone behind. In addition, geopolitics and commercial interest should not compete against the public interest, as these are some of the underlying challenges that have drifted us away from the free and open Internet, serving only the advantaged.

Our position

Internet access

1. We commend the commitment presented in the Zero Draft of the GDC to close the digital divide by connecting all people to the Internet and the realization that this will require significant and aligned investments from governments, relevant stakeholders, and the private sector. In 2021, the International Telecommunications Union [reported](#) that coverage and density of national transmission networks are lagging in LDCs and this has ramifications for Internet access and the quality of service. We believe that reliable Internet access will enhance education, health, decent work, and economic growth, accelerate gender equality and reduce inequalities. It is in this regard that we believe **meaningful connectivity should be included as a core and structural policy in the sustainable development goals** to enhance already existing goals. We reiterate the importance of securing funding for less developed countries (LDCs), particularly in the Global South, to close the digital divide and ensure that national data infrastructure, including data centers, are promoted in LDCs.
2. We also commend the GDC's desire to assign roles for developing a Compact implementation map with time-bound targets for achievement. This will promote transparency and accountability in implementing the ideals set out in the GDC.
3. We also commend the commitment to *“refrain from Internet shutdowns and ensure that any restrictions are in full compliance with international law, including with the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination.”* We call upon the organisers of the Summit of the Future to ensure that states, especially in the Global South, sign a pledge committing to respecting and honoring the commitments laid out in the GDC.

Research and data access

4. Commendably, both the Common Agenda policy brief 8 and the Zero Draft of the GDC call for researcher access to data. Datafication of almost most daily human activities and interactions leaves a vast amount of data. This data is currently concentrated and held by a few stakeholders and platform owners, creating a power imbalance and dependency on intelligence between countries, communities and stakeholder groups. Researcher access to data can help society understand some of the emerging societal challenges such as election disinformation, gender-based violence, and so on, thereby, **enabling communities to benefit from their own data as a common good**. While calling for the development of human rights-respecting frameworks for enhancing data access for research, we also note the unequal efforts and challenges (both on the demand and supply side) that hinder data access for Global South Researchers held by global tech intermediaries.
5. Mozilla Foundation recently highlighted the plight of researchers through an [Open Letter To Meta](#) after Meta decided to commercialise its data through its API and limit access to researchers by discontinuing CrowdTangle. This has been the trend since Elon Musk's X ownership, with many researchers spending over USD 5,000 for data for public research, whereas these costs can be utilised for talent and development. However, this limits accountability and engagement with policymakers using informed research. **We welcome the recommendations for data sovereignty and ownership in the GDC that promote information integrity by respecting data principles that promote access, utilisation, and receptiveness to information.**
6. We welcome the proposal to develop an open portal to track national, regional and global developments towards the 2030 goals of the GDC. However, **the GDC process should open up ways for civil society participation in the development of metrics and content in the portal.** In the same efforts of inclusion, civil society should also contribute to generating knowledge to the portal.

International Institutions

7. We welcome the recognition of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) on the Zero Draft of the GDC as an important multistakeholder cooperation space. However, we emphasize that **this space can be utilized by member states, the UN Secretariat, Tech Envoy, and international organizations for an annual follow-up on the GDC.** The goals agreed upon there will require strong multistakeholder monitoring and alignment with the SDGs, a framework that the IGF already possesses.
8. We recommend that the IGF and the **GDC draw inspiration from the multistakeholder format implemented by the NetMundial initiative** to maximize opportunities for active participation and input from traditionally underrepresented sectors such as civil society, academia, and the technical community.
9. **We expect a robust mechanism in place that will ensure transparency and accountability concerning funding and implementation plans of data-centric activities.** We urge the UN to take the local context of countries, particularly in the Global South, into consideration during the decision-making process. Additionally, the mechanism in place should be able to ascertain true representation of all countries on the platform while eliminating any and all potential biases considering the global power dynamics in place.
10. However, we are also concerned that a platform like GDC leads to unnecessary use of resources and capital that can be utilized in more productive ways such as global access to data and data transparency to combat Internet censorship. With the recent increase in the use of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, **it is crucial to define and implement best practices from an intersectional perspective especially for countries in the Global South,** in order to resolve potential challenges with regards to data privacy concerns and security breaches. By doing so, we will be one step closer to making the Internet an inclusive, threat-free platform globally.

About us

Global South Alliance

The Global South Alliance was formed at the beginning of 2023, after a long process of engagement between Aapti Institute, Data Privacy Brasil and Paradigm Initiative - which now compose the Alliance's Steering Committee. Besides them, other 10 organizations from Asia, Africa and Latin America are members. They are: Asociación por los Derechos Civiles, Bolo Bhi, Center for Communication Governance, CIPESA, Derechos Digitales, Digital Rights Foundation, Internet Bolivia, KICTANet, Pollicy and Research ICT Africa.

The Alliance was formed with the mission of unifying NGOs dedicated to the promotion of **mutual learning and the advancement of digital rights with a perspective from the Global South**. Based on meetings at the Data Privacy Global Conference, RightsCon and Internet Governance Forum, the organizations structured an alliance that aims to create bonds of solidarity and dialogue between organizations from the Global South (or Majority World). It does not seek the goal of creating a formal coalition to represent the Global South, but rather promotes a space for mutual strengthening, dialogue and listening between a small group of organizations.

Some of the Alliance's initiatives so far include a collective [contribution for the Global Digital Compact](#) and the launch of the [Datafication and Democracy Fund](#). The Alliance's work is focused on:

- (a) Challenging inequalities and asymmetries:** Coordinating work on visa discrimination, how to protect Global South organizations against discrimination, to help each other on financial issues and governmental repression against the work of civil society;
- (b) Raising our voices together:** Coordinating work on Global Digital Compact and policy issues like digital public infrastructure, digital IDs, and data-driven public policies in the Global South.

Data Privacy Brasil

[Data Privacy Brasil](#) is an organization born from the collaboration between a

school and a civil association, dedicated to promoting the culture of data protection and digital rights in Brazil and worldwide. Since 2018, we have been working towards this goal by developing training programs, events, certifications, consulting services, multimedia content, public interest research, and civic audits to promote rights in a data-driven society marked by asymmetries and injustices. We believe that the protection of personal data is one of the foundations of democracy and it needs to be considered from the perspective of social justice and power asymmetries. We work to promote a culture of data protection and to ensure that digital rights are fundamental rights for everyone, carrying out research that is open to the public, guided by a strong social commitment and with ethical funding.

InternetBolivia.org Foundation

It is an organization founded in 2018 in Bolivia to promote the defense of digital rights and digital inclusion. Since then it has implemented more than 20 projects funded within the focus of achieving a plural internet and a strategic use of digital technologies for social and local development. Its areas of work are personal data protection, the fight against digital gender violence, closing the digital divide, freedom of expression and participation on the internet, and finally, the development of digital skills and capacities to take advantage of the digital economy.

Paradigm Initiative

[Paradigm Initiative \(PIN\)](#) is a pan-African nonprofit that connects African youth with digital opportunities and ensures digital rights for all, with team members operating out of Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. With operations spanning more than 15 years, including ground-level engagement in 27 African countries and counting, PIN is at the forefront of promoting Internet Freedom in Africa. PIN's work involves driving systemic change through capacity building, research, advocacy, creative communications, strategic litigation, policy and legislative change, and organising the Digital Rights and Inclusion Forum. Furthermore, PIN's innovative ICT-powered offerings equip young Africans, small businesses and civil society organisations with tools to thrive.

Research ICT Africa

[Research ICT Africa \(RIA\)](#) is an African think tank that has operated for over a decade to fill a strategic gap in the development of a sustainable information

society and digital economy. It has done so by building the multidisciplinary research capacity needed to inform evidence-based policy and effective regulation Africa. RIA's dynamic and evolving research agenda examines the uneven distribution of the benefits and harms of the intensifying global processes of digitalisation and datafication. On this basis, we seek to provide alternative policy and regulatory strategies that produce different outcomes that will address digital inequality in Africa and enable data justice. Through rigorous research and analysis RIA seeks to build an African knowledge base in support of digital equality and data justice, and to monitor and review developments on the continent.

Pollicy

[Pollicy](#) is an award-winning feminist civic technology organisation that works at the intersection of data, design, and technology in Africa. We are a feminist collection of technologists, data scientists, creatives and academics looking to digitally transform service delivery across Africa and craft better life experiences by harnessing improved data. Our passion is focused on influencing a culture of responsible data use, promoting appropriate data governance practices, and advocating for policies that support an enabling data ecosystem.

Digital Rights Foundation

[Digital Rights Foundation](#) (DRF) is a research based advocacy NGO focusing on ICTs to support human rights, democratic processes and digital governance. DRF envisions a place where people, especially women, are able to equally exercise their right of expression without being threatened. We believe that free internet with access to information and impeccable privacy policies can encourage such a healthy and productive environment that would eventually help not only women, but the world at large.

