

IGF Main Session on Internet Governance & Digital Cooperation, 26 November 2019

The Main session of the 2019 IGF on Internet Governance and Digital Cooperation provided a space for engagement by the IGF community on the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General (SG) António Guterres' High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation (HLPDC), as outlined in its [report](#) released in June 2019.

Introductory Comments

The discussion began with opening remarks by Lynn St. Amour and Dr. Daniela Brönstrup (Host Country representative) as co-chairs of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (IGF-MAG). Germany and the United Arab Emirates were selected by Under-Secretary-General (USG) Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond to serve as “Co-Champions” for the follow-up process to recommendations 5A and 5B of the report.

The USG delivered keynote remarks, stressing that the purpose of the panel was to present recommendations on how to strengthen cooperation in the digital space among relevant actors, at a scale that fits the dimension of challenges. He noted the need for international cooperation to complement the existing efforts, which are overwhelmingly national and regional, given that technology ignores borders, and should continue to do so. He noted that legislation lags far behind innovation, and that there is a stark need to include the Global South, as well as women, beyond mere ‘tokenism,’ to avoid widening existing digital divides. In closing, the USG presented the linkage between UN75 efforts (whereby the SG will check the global temperature on where global cooperation may be revived in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations) with upholding a free, safe, secure, global internet.

General comments on the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation's Report

Ambassador Benedicto Fonseca Filho of Brazil, former chair of the CSTD working group on enhanced cooperation, then moderated the first part of the discussion among all four stakeholder groups at the IGF, in his personal capacity, focusing on general comments on the report.

Overall, there was widespread support among all stakeholder groups for the **multistakeholder approach** to internet governance, with some pointing to the need for multilateralism as well. Many pointed to essential principles needed, notably a free, open, transparent, bottom-up approach to internet governance, without duplicating existing structures. A number of participants noted that the options for updated mechanisms for global digital cooperation put forward in the HLPDC report were not mutually exclusive, and may be combined.

There was broad recognition about **progress that has been made in the IGF** since its inception, including through the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, Best Practice Forums, and the growing number of national and regional IGFs feeding the international forum, as a good example of bottom-up, open processes.

Some stakeholders highlighted the desirability of **linking different processes** – including NetMundial and the IGF outcomes – with other UN processes (e.g. the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the Second Committee of the General Assembly) in order to consult more broadly and gain further support for outcomes. It was noted by some that some governments still have an interest in intergovernmental approaches, and that there is a role for that in some instances. Others suggested

discussing decisions from the UN within the IGF. Still others noted the need for greater coordination within the UN on approaches to the internet.

While there was some support and recognition for the recent proliferation of **regulation** around internet governance, and a greater role for governments, many cautioned against a splintering of efforts, and pointed to the need for coordination. Many also pointed to the risk of regulations occurring in silos, and the need for more political engagement in technical discussions and vice versa.

Some participants expressed **concern regarding the transparency so far of the follow-up process on the HLPDC's report** coordinated by the UN Executive Office (e.g. on selecting the champions and setting up the roundtable discussions). To this, the USG expressed willingness to engage with all stakeholders on steps taken and the rationale behind them, and welcomed engagement by all on the follow-up to the report.

Community Discussion on Digital Cooperation Architectures and Recommendations 5A & 5B

The subject of the second part of the main session was an in-depth discussion on the three different models for digital cooperation, namely: "IGF Plus", "Distributed Co-Governance Architecture" and "Digital Commons Architecture" (as outlined in chapter 4 of the HLPDC's report) and the specific recommendations 5A and 5B (as outlined in chapter 5). Lynn St. Amour as MAG Chair moderated this part of the session.

There was **widespread support for the HLPDC's proposal for an "IGF+"** that would strengthen and enhance the existing IGF. Many participants mentioned the valuable outputs that the IGF is already producing (e.g. through its Best Practice Forums, Dynamic Coalitions and major intersessional policy initiatives) and the opportunity to build on this good work with an "IGF+".

Many participants emphasized the need for more **inclusive participation** at the IGF, particularly from governments, business communities and the Global South. Furthermore, there was broad agreement that **more stable funding** for the IGF – particularly for the IGF Secretariat – has to be secured. In this regard, participants welcomed the support provided by Germany to increase participation by the Global South in the 2019 IGF, together with parliamentarians and small-and medium-sized enterprises, as well as the announced financial support of €1 million over the next three years for the IGF.

There was general agreement that the **IGF should remain bottom-up** and community-driven. The work of the national, regional and youth Initiatives (NRIs) was acknowledged positively, underlining the need to integrate their value-added into the IGF+ model.

Several participants noticed the current **gap between dialogue and decision-making** and expressed the view that the IGF needs to be more focused and has to produce more actionable and tangible outcomes. At the same time, some underlined that the IGF should remain a non-decision-making forum.

Some participants specifically supported the **cooperation accelerator** of the IGF+ model, aiming at better coordinating all the existing processes and initiatives dealing with digital policy issues (e.g. the Paris Call and the Christchurch Call). It was mentioned that the Cooperation accelerator could serve as a coordination mechanism linking the dialogue at the IGF to already existing decision-making institutions. As a way to conduct this distribution, it was suggested to introduce a liaison function between the MAG and other institutions dealing with digital policy issues.

While the IGF+ model was discussed in-depth, there were **few interventions addressing the other two models** ("Distributed Co-Governance Architecture" and "Digital Commons Architecture"), although some mentioned the potential complementarity of some of their features with the IGF+ model. One civil

society representative noted that the founders of the internet would have supported a distributed co-governance architecture and the development of common protocols. It was reported from the EuroDIG's consultation process that the "Digital Commons Architecture" did not receive support within their consultation process.

There was, however, support for the appointment of a "**Tech Envoy**" reporting to the UN Secretary-General, who would be responsible for coordinating the policy on digital cooperation and interdependence across the UN system. Some participants noted that the Envoy role could be modeled on that of the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 (Nitin Desai).

There were expressions of support to the notion of institutionally linking the IGF directly to the Executive Office of the Secretary General, though some participants noted the need to elaborate on what this would entail.

It was mentioned that the **Sustainable Development Goals** do not explicitly mention ICT. It was suggested that the outcomes of the many expert groups working on the SDG's should be incorporated in a possible "IGF+".

In closing, Lynn St. Amour noted that implementing the **IGF+ requires participation and finance**, but will be worthwhile for all who benefit from this forum.

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For the report:

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