

IGF Leadership Panel Outlook for IGF Future

Preamble

This document aims to recommend ways to further strengthen the IGF to fully deliver on its potential. By outlining key areas for enhancement, this document seeks to support ongoing efforts to make the IGF more impactful, action-oriented, and responsive to global digital policy challenges. In particular, the document outlines **(a)** how the IGF should look like after WSIS+20, **(b)** how the IGF can be useful as part of the implementation of the WSIS+20 and Global Digital Compact outcomes, and **(c)** what the IGF needs to do to better itself to achieve the broader vision for the future of the IGF.

The IGF: a multistakeholder platform for gathering input from the global community on digital policy matters

When Internet Governance Forum (IGF) first took place in 2006 in Athens, there were 1,200 participants from 90 countries and the topics were concentrated around traditional internet-related topics like openness, security, diversity, access, and the emerging issues of the time. 10 years later, the IGF had grown to 2,000 onsite and 3,000 remote participants from 123 countries and the scope of topics broadened to embrace the digital evolution. At the same time, National and Regional IGFs (NRIs), along with internet summer schools, were thriving, with the 72 recognized NRIs comprising 17 Regional IGFs (e.g. Africa IGF, Asia-Pacific IGF, European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG), Latin American and Caribbean Internet Governance Forum (LACIGF)); 45 National Regional IGFs (NRIs) (e.g. IGFs in Kenya, the UK, the USA, Nigeria, Brazil, etc.); and 10 Youth IGFs (e.g. Youth LACIGF, Youth IGF Germany) as of 2016.

Today, 20 years later, the IGF has become a truly international powerhouse of ideas and exchanges between governments, industry, NGOs, technical community and social society. It attracts more than 10,000 participants from 178 countries dealing with all topics related to the digital age. There is no other global event that contributes to shaping discussions on Internet and digital policy issues among all stakeholders on equal footing. The IGF uniquely provides a space that values interactions, fosters understanding of different perspectives, and encourages open exchanges. It serves as an essential platform where governments, businesses, civil society, academic and technical communities come together to navigate the complexities of the digital world, ensuring inclusive and informed policymaking.

The IGF has proved to be one of the most successful global policy examination processes with stakeholders from all over the world, and the countries that are hosting the event attract and engage local stakeholders in a way few other conferences can. The number of NRIs has since grown to 140, and counting. The IGF ecosystem also hosts a powerful array of other intersessional work streams (Policy Networks, Dynamic Coalitions, Best Practice Fora) gathering experts from all stakeholder groups and covering a wide range of technical and public policy issues.

This is the foundation on which we should now build 20 more successful years and make sure that this unique forum is secured for generations to come.

A. How the IGF should look after WSIS+20

Stronger role in the UN system

What

The IGF should work more closely with UN agencies that deal with digital policy. Better coordination can increase its ability to contribute and avoid duplication of efforts, which would be a win for all the UN

agencies as they get access to the IGF's diverse multistakeholder expertise, resources and input from a global community.

Why

A stronger role for the IGF will bring the insights of the NRIs and the intersessional workstreams to more UN processes and also help mainstream the successful multistakeholder model that has improved stakeholder buy-in.

How

Use the ongoing World Summit on the Information Society 20-year (WSIS+20) review process to request permanent status and not just a mandate extension for the IGF.

Clear, targeted, and effective communication of outputs

What

The IGF should deliver clearer, more targeted, and more effective communication of the outputs and messages it produces to decision-makers. This can make its work more useful to policymakers. The IGF outputs should also form inputs into the work of the NRIs who could curate relevant policy messages to member state agencies at the local, national and regional levels and ~~then get a chance to review the outputs and~~ bring updates to the next global IGF.

Indeed, the IGF is the ideal conduit, through the NRIs, for issues of concern to communities at the local level to be heard by policymakers at the national and global levels.

Why

There is an opportunity to strengthen the invaluable work done at the IGF, and by the NRIs, to positively influence public policies related to the Internet. This would further raise the utility of the IGF's outputs in global decision-making processes, building on the IGF's unique convening power that brings together a truly global multistakeholder community.

How

Include measurable and actionable recommendations in the output documents of IGF and NRI meetings. Use the Internet We Want (IWW) framework and the Global Digital Compact (GDC) to assess what and how to measure and do a specific follow-up every year in sessions dedicated to addressing the progress and discussing how to improve or sustain progress. Capacity building for NRI engagement in this work would be extremely beneficial.

Permanent institutional structure

What

The IGF cannot rely solely on voluntary funding. It needs to become a permanent UN body and be a supported part of the regular UN budget.

Why

The IGF has proven its value in its 20 years of functioning and added value to Internet-related policy discussions. It is time for it to become a permanent structure. Its unique function in enhancing and fostering meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders on digital cooperation should be sustained.

A stable funding model will strengthen the capacity of the IGF and its resources, especially the Secretariat, which manages the end-to-end process for the Forum, NRIs, and other activities.

How

Use the WSIS+20 review process to present the request and get the buy-in of various stakeholders, especially governments as they will play a major role in the review process.

“Internet We Want” as a reporting framework

The Leadership Panel’s paper on the “Internet We Want” (IWW) can be used to systematically review, report, and track progress by the IGF community on the issues discussed at the IGF. This would help pin-point areas for further action to reach the Internet We Want.

B. How the IGF can support the implementation of WSIS+20 and GDC outcomes

Ensuring stakeholder representation

The IGF brings the most ample range of voices to Internet governance and digital policy discussions and has been doing so since its inception. It is still important to strive for as many diverse stakeholders participating as possible. By the many national and regional IGFs and summer schools, IGF is the ideal vehicle for ensuring worldwide representation and discussion of the WSIS+20 and the GDC together with the other discussions ongoing in the different fora.

Legitimacy and effectiveness

As part of the implementation of the WSIS+20 and GDC outcomes, the IGF can enhance their legitimacy and effectiveness. By nature, the IGF brings transparency, open dialogue and diverse perspectives to global discussions. By enhancing IGF involvement the knowledge sharing and feedback will also be amplified in a manner that is essential for the legitimacy but also future inclusion of youth, underserved areas and other disadvantaged groups.

Avoiding duplication of efforts and creation of new structures

The WSIS+20 and GDC outcomes should leverage the IGF for their implementation. Together, and in close coordination, the IGF and the WSIS Forum should build the basis for the implementation and follow-up of the WSIS and GDC processes. This approach avoids fragmentation and duplication of efforts. It also ensures inclusivity, especially for underrepresented regions, which cannot afford to participate in the broad number of similar UN agency initiatives.

Adaptation of IGF to future needs and evolution of the Internet

The IGF may need to further adapt its operation to provide more concrete recommendations to all stakeholders, including governments. A combination of NRIs, Internet Society Chapters and participants in IGF may be able to provide useful and localized information about the use, availability, performance and utility of the Internet. Such data may be essential to inform the crafting of policies regarding the operation and use of the Internet. Balancing regulatory actions for the protection of users and maintaining the demonstrated value of an open Internet should be a major focus of IGF attention. Along these lines, the IGF and NRIs might usefully engage with member state representatives to enhance awareness and clarity of the Internet’s value and potential actions (e.g. technical and regulatory) to make it a safer and more productive environment.

There is a clear opportunity to engage the IGF and the NRIs and other Internet-aware bodies such as the Internet Society and its Chapters to evaluate the implementation of the Global Digital Compact in the countries where this is underway. It is timely to put to work the capacity of the IGF and like-minded

bodies to improve the Internet ecosystem, making it a safer, more secure, affordable and sustainable infrastructure. Working with member states and their policy-making entities, the IGF can help to materially grow the benefits of the global Internet for generations to come.

C. What the IGF needs to do better itself, in order to achieve the broader vision for the future of the IGF

Reflecting on the IGF's current practices, several strengths and challenges stand out:

1. Enhancing Transparency:

- Strengths: The IGF maintains open discussions with livestreams, archived sessions, and published reports.
- Challenges: Limited clarity on how discussions influence global digital policies, leading to perceptions of limited impact.

2. Engaging Broader Stakeholders:

- Strengths: Strong multistakeholder model involving governments, private sector, civil society, technical and academic communities.
- Challenges: Ensuring equal representation of all parts of the world. There is unequal representation, including participants from the Global South¹, which affects perceived exclusiveness.

3. Promoting Accountability and Trust:

- Strengths: Respected for neutrality and inclusiveness.
- Challenges: Lack of binding decision-making power and limited feedback on the use of stakeholder inputs, affecting trust and accountability perceptions.

4. Navigating Information Overload:

- Strengths: Comprehensive coverage of digital governance topics with extensive documentation.
- Challenges: Information overload and lack of synthesis, making it difficult for stakeholders to extract actionable insights or identify key narratives.

It is important to recognize the work the IGF has already undertaken to promote open dialogue and inclusive participation. At the same time, the evolving digital landscape presents opportunities to further strengthen its impact and trustworthiness.

In this spirit, in order to achieve the vision for the IGF future, there are a few considerations to be put in place across the IGF's internal and external workstreams, notably:

1. Communication:

- Develop clear communication channels and messages to demonstrate the influence of IGF discussions on international policy dialogues, including G20, G7, and UN bodies.
- Introduce structured follow-up mechanisms to track and report on the implementation and impact of IGF recommendations, making our contributions more visible and tangible.

2. Broaden Stakeholder Engagement and Inclusion:

- Explore ways to increase outreach, at global level, grassroots digital communities, youth networks, and emerging digital voices, including in the Global South, ensuring their perspectives are integrated into mainstream discussions.
- Establish dedicated tracks or platforms to amplify underrepresented voices and foster more diverse participation.

¹IGF 2022-2024 reports (breakdown of participants per region indicating inequalities in participation).

- National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs) are particularly crucial in achieving this. Strengthening NRIs could significantly contribute to a more representative dialogue.
- 3. Accountability and Legitimacy:**
- Implement feedback loops that show how stakeholder inputs influence IGF outcomes and global policy discussions.
 - Enhance transparency in decision-making processes could further reinforce trust and legitimacy, particularly among sceptical audiences.
- 4. Improve Information Curation and Accessibility:**
- With the extensive wealth of knowledge generated at the IGF, developing user-friendly summaries, infographics, and thematic reports could help distil complex discussions into actionable insights.
 - Leveraging digital tools and AI-driven analytics could also enhance content curation, making it easier for stakeholders to navigate information efficiently.

The IGF is uniquely positioned to transform from a target of scepticism into a facilitator of trust, accountability, and constructive dialogue.

