Input by the Association for Progressive Communications: Taking stock of the 2016 work programme and the 11th IGF and suggestions for 2017 and the 12th IGF

January 2017

A) Taking stock of the 2016 programming, preparatory process, community intersessional activities and the 11th annual IGF: What worked well? What worked not so well?

Venue

- The venue was good overall. There were some problems finding rooms, but the volunteers were extremely helpful in assisting with this.
- A significant number of rooms for workshops ended up being too small and could not fit the interested participants.
- The venue was very far from the city centre. This meant significant time was spent travelling back and forth to the venue in the case of those who booked early, before the venue was changed, or because that is where they found affordable options. This was a problem from an environmental perspective and constrained people's time (although it made for some interesting meetings in taxis).
- The outdoor lunch space was nice, and there was a good selection of affordable options for lunch, but the voucher system was unnecessarily complicated.
- The exhibition space was a good space, but it alternated between being too cold in the morning and too hot in the middle of the day, making it hard to use at times.

Remote participation

As with previous years, the IGF organisers provided for remote participation, allowing for the participation of members of the internet governance community beyond those who could be physically present. As with previous years, this well-intentioned effort suffered from some shortcomings:

- Connectivity at the venue was not great at times, which meant that people were struggling to follow the streaming.
- The relaying of the remote participation questions was not always verbatim, which meant that the meaning was not always conveyed accurately.
- Some remote participants have found the proprietary WebEx client software from Cisco difficult to use. In late January, it was revealed that there are huge vulnerabilities in this software, so much so that Google and Mozilla have removed the WebEx extensions from their store this week, pending a fix. We suggest that the IGF explore web-based or open source tools that do not require installation for remote participation in the 2017 IGF.
- The IGF site was temporarily unavailable on 8 December, which made it challenging for remote participants to follow the proceedings at times.

Welcome dinner for participants

The 2016 IGF did not include a gala for participants, but instead the governor of the state of Jalisco hosted an invitation-only dinner, which was less inclusive than in some previous years. This was compounded by having listed a gala in the schedule, thus setting expectations that could not be met.

Intersessional work

Over time, Dynamic Coalitions have become much stronger. In particular, the DC on Community Connectivity (DC3), which was only launched last year at the IGF in Joao Pessoa, was very visible, with a number of references to community networking during this year's event. Best Practice Forums are beginning to deliver. It is necessary to keep supporting and strengthening them. They are spaces for deepening conversations on issues.

Uptake of gender issues

Gender issues were brought up consistently and were fairly visible across workshops and main sessions, with new actors organising sessions in this area. There were several workshops on gender-based online violence, which indicates that the issue is being taken seriously and being discussed. Issues ranging from sexual health education in Nepal to the use of online harassment to silence women in post-war Sri Lanka were discussed at the 2016 IGF. The Gender Report Card continues to be a formal part of the IGF monitoring process.

Unfortunately, it is still mostly women and other gender/sexual minorities participating in these sessions and raising questions of inclusion at the IGF. For example, the Dynamic Coalition on Gender and Internet Governance room was overflowing with participants but had less than 10 men in the room at a time.

In addition, the IGF needs to address gender as more than just women and men.

New issues, new voices

- Human rights: With the main session on human rights, human rights were not just visible at the IGF, but the conversation broadened significantly to bring in economic, social and cultural rights in a way we haven't seen in previous years. In addition, newer issues like sexual rights and the human rights implications of ICANN's policies and work were also discussed.

- Community networks: The presence, participation and inputs of community network actors were noticeably increased from recent past IGFs, which contributed substantively to taking forward the discussion on access.
- Youth: As in 2015, there was a noticeable presence of young people at the IGF, which energised and challenged the discussions. Programmes sponsoring youth participation should be continued.

That said, as we elaborate on below, there are still voices and issues (like cybersecurity and workers' rights) that are currently under-represented at the IGF, and efforts should be made to ensure that they are more actively engaged next year.

Links between local, regional and global

The IGF continues to be a constructive venue for both vertical and horizontal linkages in internet governance:

- Vertical: This year we saw greater visibility of local initiatives and the connections between the regional and global dimensions of internet governance. For example, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression held a joint consultation at the IGF in Guadalajara relating to freedom of expression and the ICT sector.
- Horizontal: There was also a continued trend of increased linkages across internet policy forums, with the participation of institutions dealing with internet-related public policy. For example, for the first time UN Women and UNICEF organised events at the IGF.

Space for local civil society groups

The serious human rights crisis in the host country was highlighted consistently by Mexican civil society throughout the IGF, from the pointed intervention by R3D during the human rights main session, to the powerful speech by ARTICLE 19 Mexico, which reflected the inputs of various Mexican civil society groups. It is critical that those who spoke out do not face reprisals or intimidation now that the IGF community has left.

Relevance of the IGF as a networking/collaboration platform

Apart from the formal agenda, the IGF continues to be a valuable space for building/strengthening partnerships and collaborations among and within stakeholder groups through side meetings and informal exchanges.

B) Suggestions for improvements in 2017 (programming, preparatory processes, community intersessional activities and improvements for the 12th annual meeting)

Participation

- It is well recognised that there is a need to increase participation from all stakeholder groups from the global South in the IGF. Increased participation must also translate to more workshops being organised and led by stakeholders from the global South. We suggest that the IGF Secretariat work to secure funds for this purpose. Participation needs to be diversified to ensure that the IGF agenda responds to issues that matter to under-represented groups. The range of internet-related public policy issues is constantly expanding and the IGF should find a way to engage new actors who can share their knowledge with the IGF community.

- As a multistakeholder space, the IGF should ensure it is a welcoming and safe platform for all stakeholders, particularly for civil society groups from the host countries.

- The IGF should prioritise increasing the involvement of governments, particularly governments from the global South. We propose that the MAG initiate discussions with these governments very early on in the preparatory process for the annual IGF, including by sending formal invitations to governments early in the year. Since the next IGF is in Geneva, where governments from all regions have representation, there is more of an opportunity for participation from governments from the global South. The MAG should consider taking advantage of this situation by using Day 0 for a half day of stakeholder meetings – for example, an intergovernmental meeting, a meeting for academia, civil society, the private sector, and so on. A number of stakeholder groups use the days preceding the IGF for these types of meetings already. The MAG should also consider engaging institutions like the Inter-Parliamentary Union to facilitate the participation of parliamentarians in the IGF.

- The location and timing of the 2017 IGF will be a major barrier for the participation of stakeholders from the global South. The IGF Secretariat should proactively search for ways to support participation from the global South, including by partnering with the Geneva Welcome Centre (Le Centre d'Accueil - Genève Internationale - CAGI) to secure subsidised accommodation, as is done with other international meetings in Geneva. Consideration should also be given to moving the dates of the IGF earlier so that they are not so close to the end of the year holidays, when flights are prohibitively expensive. Resources should also be invested in remote participation, including consideration of remote hubs, as were organised at NETmundial.

Programming

We suggest that the programming for the 2017 IGF should more explicitly link up with other UN processes, taking advantage of its location in Geneva.

- Linking with the SDG follow-up: In order to take concrete steps to align SDG follow-up with the IGF, the IGF should align a stream of its work with the Goals selected for the annual High Level Political Forum. This would a) increase relevance to governments and ministers for whom the SDGs are a key priority; and b) increase relevance to all stakeholders, as it would be an opportunity to demonstrate new technologies and services that could be used to achieve the SDG of choice for a given IGF.

- Linking with the WGEC: Given that the IGF and enhanced cooperation are closely related, the CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation (WGEC) should consider holding a consultation with the IGF community ahead of finalising its work in time for the 21st session of the CSTD.

- Linking with cybersecurity processes: Cybersecurity is a critical topic in internet governance, yet there were very few sessions on this topic at the 2016 IGF. We support the idea of having a main session next year on the report of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) that the UN General Assembly has established to look in more detail at the issue of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace. The session would provide an opportunity for stakeholders other than governments to provide their feedback and inputs on the report, in a way similar to what the main session on the WSIS+10 Review did at the 2015 IGF.

Intersessional work

- We recommend the continued strengthening of intersessional work. In particular, we would like to see continued intersessional work on thematic issues related to human rights, gender, and cybersecurity through Best Practice Forums. This is especially important given the diverse areas

encompassed by these themes and their pronounced relevance to internet policy discussions, as well as the capacity of the IGF to foster multistakeholder conversations while increasingly linking with other UN processes.

- We also recommend the continued development and strengthening of Dynamic Coalition work as one of the primary platforms for intersessional work at the IGF, and linking this to one of the main areas of work for the IGF. Thought needs to be given to how the work of the DCs is shared and enables engagement with the broader IGF community, and the MAG and Secretariat should play a continued role to support this process.

- We recommend establishing processes so that intersessional work can continue despite the wait for a new MAG to be established.

- We recommend increasing links between the global IGF and national and regional forums, especially since it will be difficult for many people to attend the 2017 IGF in Geneva.

Strengthening the IGF

We recommend putting in motion the steps recommended by the CSTD working group on IGF improvements and continuing to foster the dialogue initiated by the IGF retreat on ways to improve the IGF and advance its mandate. It is important for this discussion to happen with the broader IGF community ahead of the IGF in Geneva and to revisit contributions to that discussion. Here are APC's concrete recommendations on how to improve and strengthen the IGF: http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/igf-meeting/igf-2016/takingstock/779-apcinputtoigfretreat-july2016/file

Acknowledgements

APC extends its appreciation to the government of Mexico and the local organising committee for making the IGF happen in 2016. APC wants to thank the IGF Secretariat which once again managed to pull off a huge and successful event under challenging circumstances. (We say this every year!) Thank you also to UNDESA and other UN staff for their invaluable operational support. We thank all those who contribute the financial support which makes the IGF possible, and the interpreters, the captioners, and the remote participation team who make it such a uniquely inclusive event. We also thank the members of the MAG for the intensive effort they put into developing the programme; work that is not always visible to IGF participants. We thank the workshop organisers for their effort and commitment and the many hundreds of participants who make the IGF the dynamic space it is. We believe it should continue to play its pivotal role as "the" common, open, international, multistakeholder and interactive platform for debate, learning and innovation in people-centred and public interest-oriented internet governance.