Suggestions on the draft structure of the Report on improvements to the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

A contribution by the Internet technical and academic community representatives to the CSTD Working Group on improvements to the IGF

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We thank the Chair of the Working Group on improvements to the Internet Governance Forum for inviting representatives of all stakeholders groups to participate interactively with the 22 members states who form the Working Group.

I.   General principles to preserve

First, we would like to make some general notes about themes that should be reflected throughout the report. The Tunis Agenda specified that the IGF:

> "in its working and function, will be multilateral, multistakeholder, democratic and transparent".1

The Tunis Agenda further specified that the IGF would:

> "(f)acilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body".[2]

It was also convened in such a way that:

> "The IGF would have no oversight function and would not replace existing arrangements, mechanisms, institutions or organizations, but would involve them and take advantage of their expertise. It would be constituted as a neutral, non-duplicative and non-binding process. It would have no involvement in day-to-day or technical operations of the Internet."[3]

We believe the current IGF model is uniquely successful because it is:

- **A body that does not negotiate decisions**: without this fundamental characteristic, it would not be possible to have a free exchange and learn from different stakeholders' positions.
- **Supported by multistakeholder voluntary funding**: voluntary funding acts as a feedback mechanism; multistakeholder funding demonstrates that the IGF is of value.
- **Led by an independent secretariat based in Geneva where the Internet policy networks and the history of the WSIS lie**: it is important for stakeholders to feel they can trust the secretariat to be unbiased and not unduly influenced by any one interest.

It is important that these founding principles be maintained as the IGF moves forward.

The IGF is a communication process rather than a negotiation; therefore we must aim to make communication as effective as possible. The democratic, transparent processes specified in the Tunis Agenda to facilitate multistakeholder dialogue are essential to maintain open communication among participants.

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[1] Paragraph 73, "Tunis Agenda", 18 November 2005, http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html
[2] Paragraph 72b, "Tunis Agenda".
[3] Paragraph 77, "Tunis Agenda".

Suggestions on the issues to include in the proposed report format

II.   Format of the IGF meetings

The format of the IGF meetings held to date reflects the **open, transparent, and collaborative principles** under which the IGF was formed.

The IGF has been an **evolutionary process**, where meeting formats and themes have changed from year to year, responding to input from all stakeholders and evolving as the Internet, and Internet policy issues, have evolved.

The mixture of formal main sessions, more interactive workshops and reports from regional and national IGFs that has developed since the first IGF was held in 2006 has allowed the wide range of stakeholders a broad range of ways to participate in the IGF. The format of past IGFs has been refined based on the input of stakeholders through the open consultation process, through the contributions of stakeholders interested in holding workshops and side sessions, and through Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) synthesis of those inputs.

We recommend that the format of the last IGF meeting, where "feeder" workshops were scheduled before the relevant main sessions, could be further explored as a basis for future IGF meeting formats. Our experience at past IGF meetings has also shown that more interactive panel discussions that include active audience participation are a good way to engage participants. Formats such as these were successful experiments in the "trial and error" evolution of the IGF format over the past five years. It is important that this evolutionary model be allowed to continue, as it is the most flexible and innovative way that the IGF can continue to meet the needs of the evolving Internet governance ecosystem.

We recommend maintaining this **open, transparent and flexible** way of developing the meeting format to ensure the IGF continues to meet the needs of all stakeholders. The **evolutionary development process** for creating the meeting's format each year **strengthens the democratic and inclusive nature of the IGF.** Therefore, it would not be appropriate, and indeed would be harmful, to define a fixed format for all future IGF meetings.

Expanding remote participation tools as well as remote hubs has proven to be an effective way of ensuring broader participation from all over the world, particularly from developing countries. **Open, remote participation also strengthens the multilateral, multistakeholder, democratic, and transparent workings of the IGF**, in line with the principles of the Tunis Agenda.

One possible improvement to the IGF would be to look explicitly at the IGF as a process rather than an annual event. In other words, it might be useful for participants in the IGF to engage in activities relevant to the IGF themes and use the annual IGF meeting as an opportunity to inform the rest of the community of what has been done. Not only will this approach enable the IGF to move beyond being a stand-alone event, but it will also strengthen collaboration among its participants, which is key for success in any Internet-related effort. The expanding number of national and regional IGFs is already a step in this direction. Better integration of those events into the IGF process will also help to advance the utility of the IGF.

III. Shaping the outcome of IGF meetings

The IGF was constituted as a **neutral, non-duplicative, and non-binding process**. We strongly recommend that the IGF continue to operate according to these well-established and functioning parameters.

These parameters have proven to be effective: by giving every stakeholder an equal footing during open discussions. It allows any problem to be raised and all possible solutions to be explored in a supportive environment free from the negative outcomes that could arise if stakeholders felt the need to defend their positions due to the possibility of concrete decisions that could come out of the IGF process.

The IGF is successful precisely because the focus is on **sharing knowledge and perspectives, the free flow of ideas, debate, listening, and learning** from one another's experiences. Moving away from these principles and considering turning the IGF into a decision-making body would not only disregard the consensus reached in the Tunis Agenda by creating duplication of efforts and existing arrangements, mechanisms, institutions or organizations, but it would shift the focus to a more closed state (pedantic creation of documents), instead of open exchange and discussion.

The bottom-up development of national and regional IGFs is a direct result of not only the successful multistakeholder model used by the IGF, but also the non-binding nature of the discussions at the IGF. If the IGF had been a decision-making body, these local or regional IGFs would not have had the opportunity to be created without the top-down approval of decision makers at the IGF.

It is encouraging to see that many regional and national governance processes in various parts of the world have been inspired by the multistakeholder model of the IGF, adopting the same open and inclusive nature in their respective processes. The open dialogue at the global IGF has enriched and informed the discussions on regional and national levels and vice versa.

We further note that the non-binding nature of the IGF has allowed it to evolve in an open and inclusive manner, reducing barriers of participation for new stakeholders. As new participants begin to engage in Internet governance dialogues, and as the disconnected majority of the world gradually join the connected Internet world, it is important that newcomers to the IGF process are not disempowered by having to conform to a framework decided by early adopters of the IGF process, instead of being able to contribute their own unique needs and values to an evolving IGF process.

The now-established tradition of providing audio-visual archives and transcripts is an important outcome of the IGF that has provided very useful tools for stakeholder participation. One of the issues inherent in the IGF's success to date is the large number of parallel sessions that are held, and a correspondingly large number of reports, transcripts, and videos that are produced. It would help stakeholders to be able to make use of the discussions and debate that occurs at IGF if more effective ways of reporting could be produced, and trends in IGF discussions be identified and analysed, for further development by stakeholders. In the spirit of the multistakeholder approach to the IGF, solutions to more effective reporting and analysis mechanisms should be sought amongst those who participate in the process.

IV. Working methods of the IGF, in particular improving the preparation process modalities

We believe that the working methods of the IGF have been successful due to its unique, **multistakeholder approach**.

The working methods of the IGF can be separated into a number of components: **the Secretariat**; **the MAG**; **open consultations**; and the **IGF event** itself.

The Secretariat should be an **independent body, based in Geneva** to ensure the continued trust by all stakeholders in the IGF. The Secretariat should continue as a lightweight administrative process that supports the implementation of the IGF program of activities developed through both open consultations and MAG consultations.

The MAG's current working methods are effective due to the MAG's **composition from all stakeholder groups**, including the technical community, which ensures full representation of all parties in the process.

We support the continuation of the MAG and its multistakeholder composition.

We believe the selection process of the MAG members should continue to allow each unique stakeholder group to define its appropriate nomination method, leaving the secretariat to ensure wider representation based on the stakeholder nominations. In its summary report of 23 November 2010, the MAG discussed the selection process of its members and made recommendations to enhance this process.[4] We support the recommendations put forward by the MAG.

Open consultations should continue to be held as a way of further **enabling a wide cross-section of stakeholders to contribute** to the IGF program development.

We strongly believe that the IGF event should continue to be **completely open to all participants**. No accreditation or restriction should be imposed on participation in the IGF meetings. Anyone participating in the meeting should not only be permitted, but be encouraged to make their voices heard.

Where possible, the IGF should continue to provide remote participation methods, allowing those unable to travel to consultations or the yearly global IGF (such as stakeholders from developing countries, marginalised groups, or individuals without the financial backing to attend) to continue to participate in the IGF process. In its first five years, the IGF has evolved the approach to remote participation, becoming gradually more effective; this evolution must continue, building on best practices developed in other forums as well as lessons learned. To date, remote participation has been made possible through generous donations by various stakeholders, a model which has proven to be successful in the past.

Translation into UN languages should continue to be supported to enable as wide a range of input as possible.

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[4] See items 12-15, "Summary Report", Multistakeholder Advisory Group Meeting, 23 November 2010, Geneva, http://intgovforum.org/cms/2010/MAG.Summary.23.11.2010.pdf

V. Financing the Forum (exploring further voluntary options for financing)

IGF funding comes from all stakeholders – from governments, business and non-governmental organizations of all sizes – all of them with a strong confidence in the current IGF structure. **The diversity of funding sources is one of the stronger values of the IGF funding structure: no one stakeholder can be said to exert significant influence based on their contribution.**

We believe that the financing of the Forum should continue to be on a **voluntary basis and done in a transparent manner**. This ensures the **independence of the IGF structure** and it has proven to be a successful model for the IGF to date. If funding became available from the United Nations budget, it should be used exclusively to fund participation of participants from developing countries, ensuring equity among all stakeholder groups.

The continued commitment to the multistakeholder model of the IGF is vital and this multistakeholder model has drawn the willingness by a wide range of stakeholders to provide funding to support a multistakeholder IGF process. In fact, the model has resulted in not only financial support for the IGF Secretariat, but also then hosting of national and regional IGFs. As long as the IGF continues to respect all stakeholder groups as equal participants, stakeholder groups will continue to engage including through voluntary financial and in-kind contributions to the IGF. For legally incorporated organizations within the business, technical, and civil society stakeholder sectors, a formal process through which ongoing contributions can be made to the IGF would provide a measure of stability for IGF's financial security in the future.

VI. Functioning of the IGF secretariat

One key factor to the success of the IGF in the past five years is the independence of its Secretariat. This factor, as well as the professionalism of the staff, ensures that the views of all stakeholders are heard and taken into consideration.

The **IGF secretariat should continue to be financed and staffed by voluntary contributions** from stakeholder groups. Encouraging all stakeholders to support the secretariat, and exploring means to diversify funding sources is vital to **ensuring continuity of an effective and non-partisan secretariat.**

Additionally, we strongly recommend that the **IGF secretariat continue to be based in Geneva.** Over the years, experience has shown that Geneva is a relatively convenient location, capable of drawing an impressive number of organizations and individuals, and allowing Internet governance discussions to be truly multistakeholder. As the seat of the UN Commission on Sciences and Technology Development (CSTD), Geneva is now the centre for the WSIS follow-up work, and the source of the greatest expertise and experience of the process. Moving the secretariat to another location or rotating open consultation and MAG meetings regionally would impose significant costs on the IGF going forward, thereby compromising the inclusiveness of the process.

VII. Outreach to and cooperation with other organisations and fora dealing with IG issues

We believe the IGF should continue to be a **unique meeting place for the open exchange of ideas and information**.

As the Tunis Agenda instructs, the IGF should continue to strive to "(f)acilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body" while also imposing "no oversight function" and not "replac(ing) existing arrangements, mechanisms, institutions or organizations, but would involve them and take advantage of their expertise".

As well as the arrangements, mechanisms, institutions and organizations that were in place at the time the IGF was originally constituted, additional activities such as regional and national IGF events have been created directly as a result of the IGF's last five global meetings.

We see **the creation of regional and national IGFs as a very positive outcome** of the global IGF. It has allowed for more in-depth discussions among stakeholders in a particular region to discuss problems and potential solutions relevant to that region. Regional and national IGFs provide a good opportunity to enable regional/national stakeholders to conduct a dialogue with their local regional or national Internet governance organizations. In this way, there is a continual cycle of stakeholder outreach both at the global and more local levels. In addition, bringing together actors at the local level encourages stakeholders to work together to improve Internet governance in their own environments. It is encouraging to see that many regional and national governance processes in various parts of the world have been inspired by the multistakeholder model of the IGF, adopting the same open and inclusive nature in their respective processes.

The IGF should continue to be a facilitating arena that both accepts input from such organizations and events as well as distributing outcomes of discussions back to these organizations.

VIII. Inclusiveness of the IGF process and of participation at the IGF meetings (in particular with regard to stakeholders from developing countries)

The IGF should be aware of cultural differences among developing countries and take into account that the nature of their participation is rather different from developed countries, and indeed, differ widely within the range of developing countries. There must be effective mechanisms to provide the tools and processes to stakeholders from developing countries so that they feel more confident to speak up and raise their ideas and concerns as equals with developed country stakeholders. This is consistent with the horizontal theme of capacity building that the IGF adopted for its first five-year mandate. That theme must be maintained throughout the life of the IGF.

One of the advantages of the IGF is its openness: anyone can contribute to the preparatory processes; anyone can attend the meetings, either on site, or through the various online participation options. This openness should be continued and developed. In particular,

stakeholders from developing countries should be encouraged to participate. This could be achieved by:

- Raising awareness of and developing respect for the many cultural differences that exist between developing and developed country participants, and among different linguistic and stakeholder groups.
- Encouraging more experienced stakeholders to help do capacity building in developing countries so that stakeholders in such countries can participate in discussions on an equal footing with developed country stakeholders.
- Encouraging regional and national IGFs in developing countries so travel costs are reduced for participants
- Providing low bandwidth online participation options
- Encourage other Internet governance organizations to help fund participants from developing countries, disadvantaged groups and minorities to attend the IGF.

Conclusion

The IGF has grown quickly in its first five years to become the pre-eminent – and perhaps only – place where all stakeholder groups can come together and, through an open and inclusive process, learn about and discuss public policy issues related to Internet governance. During the IGF's first five-year mandate, it has evolved to achieve a level of stability in its structure, in its processes, and in its level of funding. But it must continue to improve.

This brief paper has described some of the IGF's key areas of strength and identified several areas for improvement. Of all the issues raised in this paper, perhaps the most vital one is to continue to attract participants from all stakeholder groups in the developing world and from among under-represented groups.

We look forward to continuing to contribute to the work of the CSTD Chair's Working Group on improvements to the IGF as full and active participants.

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