

Continuation of the Internet Governance Forum

Analysis of the Note of the Secretary-General

Summary

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was established by the United Nations' World Summit on the Information Society in 2005 as a non-decision-making space for Internet policy dialogue. It was given a 5 year mandate, which expires at the end of 2010.

During 2009, a consultation took place as to whether or not the IGF's mandate should be renewed. Written comments were invited through the IGF website, and Undersecretary General Sha moderated a session on IGF renewal during the Sharm el Sheikh meeting. In all, 124 contributions were made.

In May 2010, the UN Secretary General released an advanced, unedited copy of a note prepared for the General Assembly Economic and Social Council (the UNSG's draft report), to assist the General Assembly in December 2010, when it makes its decision with regard to the IGF's future.

Having reviewed the UNSG's draft report, auDA made its own analysis of feedback to the consultation on IGF renewal, and published figures on IGF attendance. Based on our analysis, we draw the following conclusions:

- There is no consensus for radical reform of the IGF.
- 87% of stakeholders wanted the IGF to continue as is, or with minor tweaks, which could be achieved without structural reform.
- Although a small minority raised significant concerns relating to the IGF's handling of the question of management of Critical Internet Resources, others expressed the view that the IGF had played an important role in diffusing tensions on this divisive issue.
- Whilst several stakeholders called for the IGF to be better resourced, only a minority called for the budget to be regularised within the United Nations. Others called for the current, voluntary funding to be increased, or made no suggestion as to *how* increased funding could be achieved.

- Finally, based on our analysis, we believe that the IGF is achieving a reasonably balanced distribution of both stakeholder and geographical engagement.

The case for reform – what people said

Consultations took place throughout 2009, a total of 124 contributions were made

The UNSG's report concludes that the majority of contributors called for "extension with improvements". On this basis, it recommends that "improvements to the format, functions and operations of the IGF be considered at its sixth meeting in 2011" (17(c)). It also states that other improvements, such as membership and rules of procedure of MAG...may be within the authority of the Secretary-General to address" (18). However, our analysis leads us to draw different conclusions.

We categorised comments as follows:

- Any suggestion which requires structural changes, or the intervention of the UN General Assembly to achieve, is categorised as "no extension without major reform"
- Any suggestion which can be achieved within the current IGF framework is categorised as "extension with improvement."

In our analysis, the 57 contributors who asked for "extension with improvement" in fact called for "extension with minor tweaks". For example, these are the top 5 most popular requests:

- Improve participation from developing countries (17)
- Improve remote participation (14)
- Support local and regional IGF meetings (12)
- Increase the priority given to development (11)
- Look at the MAG membership, role and ways of working (8)

None of these ideas require structural changes to the IGF, or the intervention of the UN General Assembly to be achieved. To quote one participant, "The IGF's framework is flexible enough to accommodate ongoing improvements without the need for fundamental changes to the model"¹.

In total, 87% called for continuation as is, or with minor tweaks – evolution not revolution.

¹ Jeff Brueqeman, AT&T

Significant concerns

The UNSG report states that “the *most significant concerns* expressed by stakeholders were that the IGF...had not devoted sufficient attention to its development remit or the specific question of management of Critical Internet Resources” (para 15, emphasis added).

Development

Development issues were two of the top 5 most popular ideas articulated in the IGF review, both in terms of better participation from developing countries (17) and increased priority for development issues (11). Advocates for a greater emphasis on development spanned the political and stakeholder spectrums.

In response, the agenda for the fifth IGF meeting in Vilnius includes a new main session devoted to Development. This epitomises the evolutionary approach of the IGF.

Critical Internet Resources

“Critical Internet Resources” and “Enhanced Cooperation” are terms of art in Internet governance dialogue. For some, they mean the management of the domain name system by ICANN, and its relationship with the US Government. Others understand the terms more broadly, eg the Working Group on Internet Governance in 2005 included “the administration of the root server system, technical standards, peering, and interconnection, telecommunications infrastructure, including innovative and convergent technologies, as well as multilingualization.”

Throughout the World Summit on the Information Society, the issue of Critical Internet Resources was highly divisive, to the extent that it threatened to derail the negotiations.

According to our analysis, those who mentioned issues relating to the management of Critical Internet Resources can be divided into three groups: those who were critical (6); those who made favourable comments relating to the IGF’s contribution to these issues (9); and those who expressed no opinion (7).

Some of the strongest criticisms of the IGF came from those stakeholders who expressed concern over this issue, eg “We would like to point out some of the IGF shortcomings...First of all, the current IGF cannot solve in substance the issue of unilateral control of the critical Internet resources” (China), or “the presence of the forum without the presence of the enhanced cooperation is like having a person asking a person to run while he only has one leg” (Saudi Arabia).

However, these concerns are more than balanced by those who made positive comments, eg noting the IGF’s role in bringing stakeholders together “after the severe mistrust and suspicions generated during the World Summit on the Information Society regarding the control of the

internet” (APC), “Just think of the environment in 2005 compared to now and you will agree with me that the cooperation, indeed, has enhanced and that the IGF plays a key role in bringing the relevant parties and issues together.” (EU Presidency).

Funding the IGF – who and how?

The UNSG draft report states “Other stakeholders have proposed regularization of the budget of the IGF within the United Nations, or even transforming the IGF into a formal body with intergovernmental machinery of the United Nations”

In fact, 6 stakeholders proposed that the IGF be funded from the UN regular budget. There was one suggestion that the IGF be incorporated into the UN machinery, and one other that the IGF co-ordinate with other multilateral agencies within the UN system.

The UNSG draft report does not make reference to 4 suggestions that the current funding arrangements should continue (ie voluntary donations securing an independent secretariat), or 6 other non-specific comments that the Secretariat should be better resourced. Our reading of the comments is that there was a general desire to see the Secretariat better funded, but a mixture of views on how this could be achieved.

In summary, a total of 8 interventions called for UN funding or absorption; whereas 10 interventions called for *more* funding – including by multi-stakeholders, and stressed the importance of maintaining an independent Secretariat.



The MAG – a *de facto* bureau

Since its inception, the IGF has had an usual organisational structure for a UN body. Instead of a formal bureau, it has had a Multistakeholder Advisory Group, 56 individuals spanning different stakeholder groups.

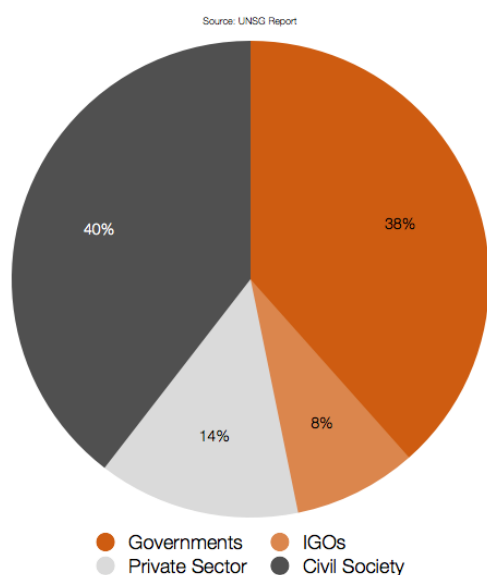
The UNSG's draft report calls the MAG "a de facto bureau" and that "other improvements, such as the membership and rules of procedure of the MAG, may be within the authority of the Secretary General to address." It acknowledges that some changes may be within the purview of the Secretariat and/or IGF participants themselves.

8 stakeholders commented on the MAG. The suggestions proposed evolution rather than revolution, and are achievable without external intervention: improve modalities of working; greater transparency; wider range of stakeholders; more regular rotation; annual reporting.

Only 3 stakeholders suggested that the IGF needed a bureau, or proposed radical reform.

Who attends the IGF – stakeholders and geographical representation

Several commentators during the consultation measured the IGF's success by its levels of participation. With its non-decision making mandate, the IGF's relevance is indicated by those who choose to attend it.

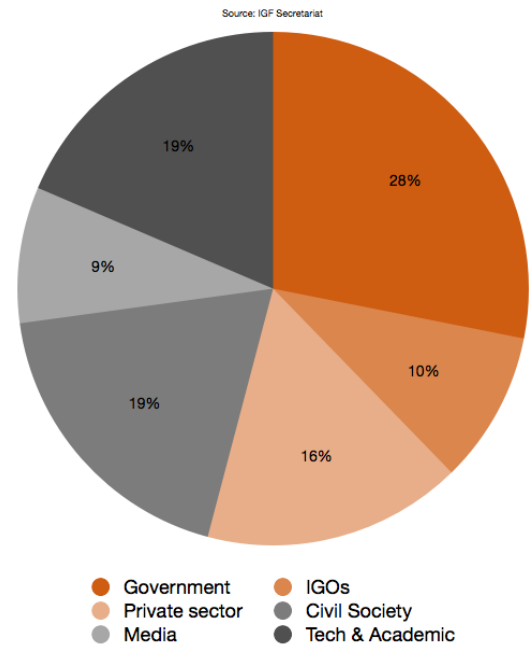


The UNSG's analysis uses four stakeholder groups: government, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), private sector, and civil society. As a result, it appears that the IGF is dominated by civil society participants.

The Tunis Agenda (paras 35 and 36) emphasises the important role that technical and academic stakeholders have played in the development of the Internet. This is appropriate, given that many of the organisations which control critical Internet resources are non-governmental, not-for-profit, private organisations, which could only be categorised as “civil society” under the traditional stakeholder categorisations.

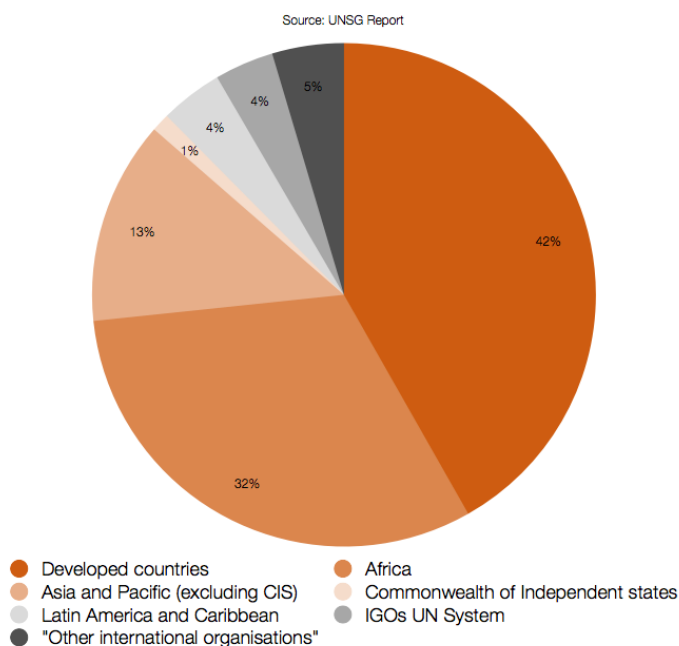
In addition, the media play a slightly different role within the IGF to that of other stakeholders, given that their primary objective is to communicate with the wider community, which might not otherwise hear of, or participate in, the IGF meetings.

In order to convey the rich variety of stakeholders who attend IGF meetings, we followed the stakeholder categorisation of government, IGOs, private sector, civil society, technical & academic (which are used in the Tunis Agenda) and the media.



Analysing attendance using the IGF Secretariat’s publicly available figures, we found that a more balanced distribution of stakeholders attended the IGF 2009 meeting.

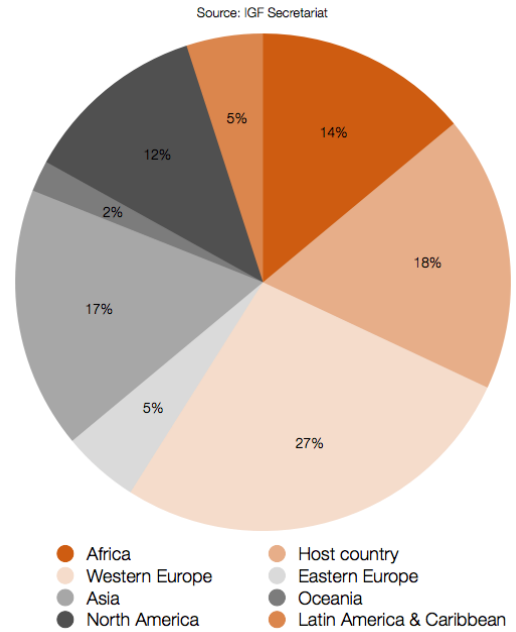
In the same way, it is important for the IGF’s success that it is able to attract attendees from all over the world, not simply developed countries.



In describing geographical attendance at the 2009 IGF meeting, the UNSG’s report mixes a thematic approach (“developed countries”) with a geographical approach (Africa, Asia and Pacific etc).

The resulting picture supports the UNSG report’s conclusion that participation was uneven.

Our analysis follows the approach taken by the IGF Secretariat, using the UN regions. Again, the resulting picture shows a more balanced, albeit imperfect, distribution by geographical region.



Conclusions

In all, our analysis of the contributions to the consultation supports our view that the IGF is regarded as a success. The majority want its mandate to be renewed. Commentators recognised that incremental improvements can be made. These can be achieved through the IGF's current structure. Adequate funding of the IGF remains a challenge, which should be addressed by all stakeholders.