

Taking stock and the way forward

(Contribution by IT for Change, in response to the IGF's questionnaire for the stock taking meeting in Geneva on 13 February 2007)

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What worked well?

The open format without a heavy governmental feel, but with a strong participation of governments nonetheless, worked well. The distributed workshop sessions that were organized by different stakeholders, with all requests for workshops being allowed, gave a sense of ownership to all stakeholders, especially those from civil society who tend to be left out from agenda setting positions in global policy forums.

The innovation of setting up 'dynamic coalitions' appears to hold promise to develop constituencies and consensus on certain IG related issues, and to possibly trigger specific activities on these issues.

What worked less well?

The plenary sessions held in a journalistic mode were perhaps (only perhaps) fine for an opening IGF meeting but this format needs to be revised in subsequent meetings. We need more focused sessions conducted by subject experts, and the panels need to be smaller. They should be able to conduct an informed discussion/ presentation, which no doubt is always a difficult task in huge conference situations like at the IGF. But taking relatively focused subject areas will help greatly. This will increase the topic selection responsibility of the IGF MAG, but with more lead time available for the Rio meeting this can be attempted to be done through a participatory process. However, some crucial decisions may still have to be taken by the MAG.

Although the overall thematic focus of the Athens meet was on development, most workshops did not address this issue. This shows the limitations of just opening up a 'facilitative' forum without direct support and action to highlight and discuss such priority issues, when the interested stakeholders may be disadvantaged in capacity on many fronts. This also makes the case for the IGF to evolve into a more proactive organization, apart from such evolution being required by the IGF's mandate listed below.

Suggestions for improvement in view of the second IGF meeting?

We remain concerned that the IGF in its present shape, as was evident at the Athens meeting, is able to fulfill just a narrow part of its mandate given by the Tunis Agenda (TA). And we see no signs of what is meant to be done regarding the larger part of the

mandate which goes beyond IGF's role as a facilitative forum for open discussion, to issues like interacting with different IG related organizations (TA 72 c), facilitating discourse between them (72 b), facilitate the exchange of information and best practices (d), do capacity building (h), promote and assess the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes (i), advice stakeholders (e), identify emerging issues and make recommendations(g) and help find solutions (k).

The stock taking meeting should undertake a serious exercise to develop processes and structures in the IGF that can enable it to meet these parts of its mandate. A couple of suggestions in this regard are listed below:

1. All major IG related organizations, like the ICANN, US government, ITU, WIPO/WTO etc, should be invited to hold open forums at the annual IGF meeting to enable a stakeholder dialogue, as also 'facilitating discourse between (among) them' (TA).
2. The IGF must be able to develop elaborate papers and reports on various important themes of IG, employing experts, especially in under-researched areas like developmental aspects of IG. This must be an ongoing exercise. (To cite an example, similar work was done by the UN ICT Task Force.) This will enable the IGF to fulfill its mandate in respect of many of the above listed areas.
3. At its annual meeting, and in the in-between periods, IGF should be able to hold workshops of its own (other than those held by various stakeholders) on key themes – for example, on the issue of promoting and assessing 'the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes' and on development issues in IG. These workshops should also be held in the regional and national contexts.
4. To be able to undertake the above activities, and to fulfill other required responsibilities, IGF must seek to establish a more substantial structure. This requires adequate funding for which a case should be made at this stock taking meeting and the issue taken up with various possible sources of funds. This includes governments who may be interested in promoting fair, open and representative global public policy structures for IG.
5. Since IGF is a global public policy body on IG issues, the money that is collected from Internet domain owners by ICANN which is already used for some IG activities, should also be used for funding IGF. In any case, IGF apparently has a better representation of the full variety of stakeholders who pay for Internet domains, directly or indirectly, than most organizations who at present use earnings from Internet domain allocation.

Any other comments or suggestions?

Included in above.

Did the synthesis paper, which gave an overview of all contributions received and which was translated in all UN languages, meet a real need? Should a similar paper be prepared prior to the next meeting?

Yes, it meets a real need, and such papers should continue to be produced.