

THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM (IGF)

Internet governance was a key issue at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which was held in two phases in Geneva, 2003 and in Tunis, 2005. The Summit recognized the need for a broad based discussion of public policy issues relating to the Internet and requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations to convene a new forum for multistakeholder policy dialogue – the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

The mandate and terms of reference of the IGF are set out in paragraphs 71 to 80 of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society.¹

The IGF initial mandate was for five years, from 2006 to 2010, subject to a review clause at the end of the mandate. The United Nations General Assembly renewed its mandate for a further five years, from 2011 to 2015 (resolution 65/141 of 20 December 2010). The mandate is up for renewal by the General Assembly at its annual session in 2015.

The IGF is supported by a small Secretariat which was established in 2006. Its main task is to prepare its yearly meetings in close consultations with all stakeholders. The Secretariat is located at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and is funded through extra-budgetary, that is voluntary contributions, by governments and other stakeholders. The annual meetings are funded by the respective Host Countries.

1. Background and context

Internet governance was a key issue raised during the first phase of WSIS (WSIS-I), held in Geneva in December 2003. It was recognized that there was a need for a better understanding of Internet governance and that it would be useful to define Internet governance and to outline the roles of the different stakeholders involved in Internet governance and how the different stakeholders would come together given their different representations and constituents.

WSIS-I requested that the Secretary-General set up a Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) to explore the issues raised and prepare a report for deliberation and appropriate action by the second phase of WSIS in Tunis in November 2005 (WSIS-II). Between the two phases of WSIS, the WGIG established an open process of consultations with the participation of all stakeholders on an equal footing. The result was a broader and more thorough understanding of the issues relating to Internet governance.

WSIS-I requested that the Secretary-General set up a Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) to look into this issue and to prepare a report for deliberation and appropriate action by the second phase of WSIS in Tunis in November 2005 (WSIS-II). Between the two phases of WSIS, the WGIG created an open process of consultations with the participation of all stakeholders on an equal footing, which contributed to a fuller understanding of the issues related to Internet governance.

¹ <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>

WSIS-II in Tunis by and large endorsed the main elements contained in the WGIG report. The Tunis phase of the Summit agreed on a broad definition of Internet governance that goes beyond domain names, protocol numbers and Internet Protocol (IP) addresses. It also identified the process of Internet governance as involving multiple stakeholders in a variety of roles. WSIS, in the Tunis Agenda, placed the discussions in a development context and called for greater efforts for capacity building, to enable developing countries to participate effectively in Internet governance arrangements. Furthermore, it identified some priority issues relating to the use of the Internet that required the attention of the international community, such as multilingualism, local content, spam and cyber security. To continue the policy dialogue on Internet governance, WSIS-II requested the Secretary-General to convene an Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

2. The IGF process

The Tunis Agenda set out in general terms the IGF mandate, the nature of its work and its working methods. However, many elements were left open, such as the nature of the IGF, the duration and frequency of its meetings as well as the substantive work programme. Following open consultations with all stakeholders, established a common understanding regarding the key elements, and first and foremost the open and inclusive nature of the IGF was established. It was also established that the IGF should meet once a year between three to five days.

To assist in convening the annual Forum, the Secretary-General established an advisory group, which was later named the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG),

The primary task of the MAG, which is made up of members from governments, private sector and civil society, including the academic and technical communities, representing all regions, is to prepare the substantive agenda and programme for the IGF meetings, taking into consideration stakeholders views. MAG members serve in their individual capacity. All IGF meetings since 2006 have been prepared in an open process, based on online inputs with a sequence of consultation meetings open to all interested stakeholders. Real-time transcriptions facilitate the comprehension and serve as an archive of the discussions which are available verbatim on the IGF website.

The series of open, multistakeholder consultations held throughout the year define the IGF's interactive and participatory process. The programme of each annual meeting is being developed in the form of a rolling document, prepared by the IGF secretariat and overseen by the MAG.

The collaborative preparatory process allows all stakeholders to move closer to a common understanding of the character of the IGF, its working methods, and how to structure and prepare its meetings.

In order to ensure the effective process of its implementation, the Under-Secretary-General of UNDESA was entrusted by the Secretary-General to support and oversee the work of the IGF Secretariat, both in terms of policy and administration.

In UN tradition, the Chairman of the IGF annual meeting is provided by the Host Country which assumes the responsibility for funding the annual meeting.

The IGF is a continual process, with a vibrant online life, where all stakeholders can bring

forward issues of concern involving Internet governance. The IGF website is the portal into this process, it has an online forum for online discussion and stakeholders can also send the Secretariat comments, issue and position papers for posting in the contributions section of the Website to stimulate discussion. The concrete effects of this public attention are exhibited by the many contributions that are submitted by all stakeholder groups during each of the phases of the preparation for the annual meetings. The discussions that take place within the annual meetings provide a rich source for both problem analysis and possible solutions that other stakeholders can take back to their respective home countries or institutions and induce local change.

3. The first IGF Cycle: 2006-2010

The meetings of the first IGF cycle from 2006-2010 were held:

- **2006 IGF Athens, Greece**
- **2007 IGF Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**
- **2008 IGF Hyderabad, India**
- **2009 IGF Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt**
- **2010 IGF Vilnius, Lithuania**

The meetings have shown that there is a wide interest and need for an international forum of this nature. Attendance has averaged around 1450 participants from all stakeholder groups, including over one hundred Member States participating, as well as strong showings from the business community, the academic and technical communities and civil society. Each of the IGF meetings has been accompanied by strong media interest with more than 150 media accreditations.

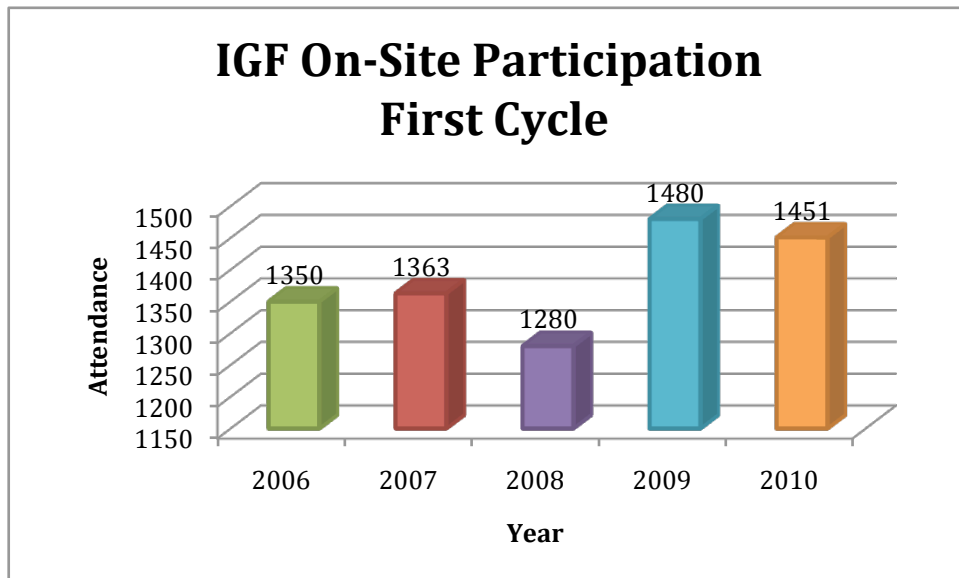
In an effort to be as inclusive as possible and ensure transparency, all the main sessions were rendered in realtime verbatim transcriptions. These transcriptions were made available on the IGF website at the end of each session and remain there as an electronic archive. All main sessions were webcast and the meetings allowed for virtual participation via email, chatrooms, text messaging and video conferencing.

The preparatory process for the first IGF meeting established a pattern that has remained the same since 2006: the main sessions are organized by the MAG. In addition, all stakeholders are invited to submit workshop proposals. The workshops are supposed to be of relevance to the themes discussed at the annual meeting and should reflect diverse perspectives. In Athens in 2006 there were a total of 36 workshop proposals which could all be accommodated. The number of proposals submitted annually increased over the years and by 2010 there were around hundred workshops that were held in parallel.

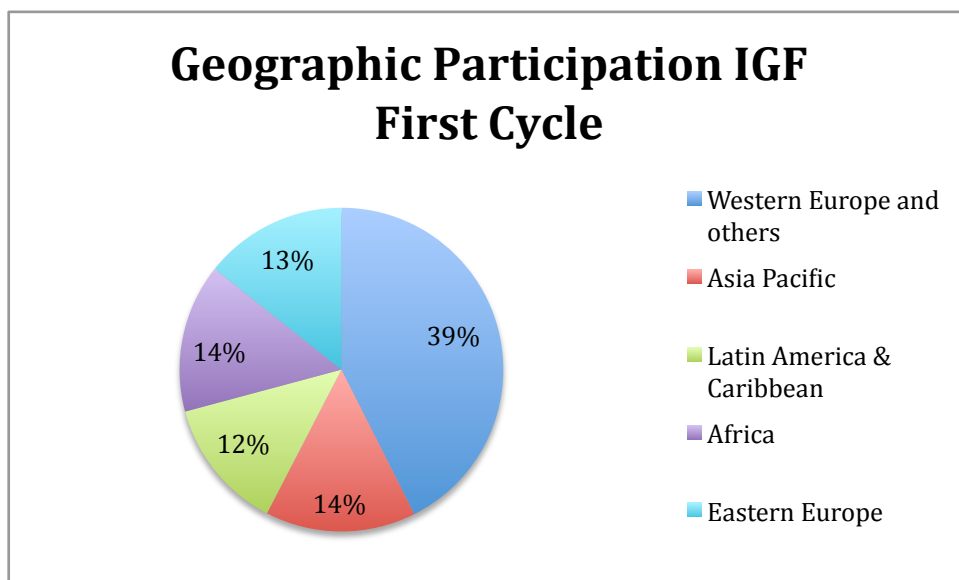
Efforts to enable remote participation were stepped up gradually. At the 2008 meeting in Hyderabad remote participation was incorporated into the meeting allowing for participants who were unable to physically attend the meeting still do so via remote hubs. At the Hyderabad meeting there were 9 registered remote hubs with 5 of them being located in the developing world. The Hyderabad meeting had 522 remote attendees. At the Vilnius meeting in 2010 there were 32 remote hubs, 27 of them being located in developing countries. The total of remote attendees for the Vilnius meeting was over 1300 participants.

In 2009, the continuation of the IGF was considered in consultations with all stakeholders at the annual meeting in Sharm-El-Sheikh, Egypt. The Secretary-General, taking into account

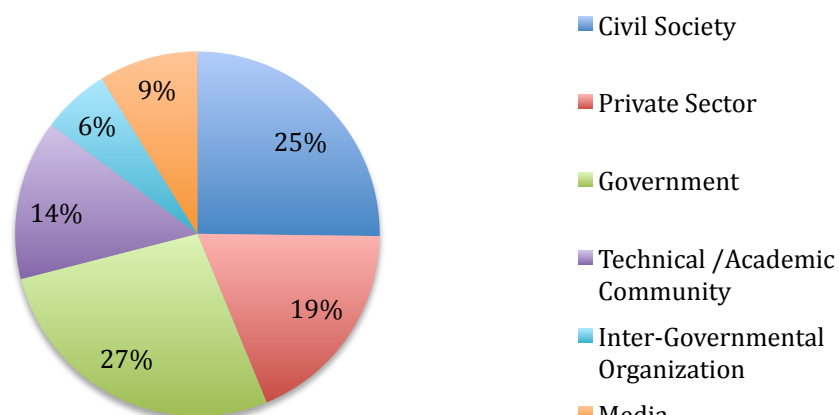
these consultations, made recommendations to the UN Member States with regard to the extension of the IGF mandate (A/65/78–E/2010/68). The General Assembly took note of the Secretary-General’s recommendations and adopted the Resolution A/C.2/65/L.56 on "Information and communications technologies for development" on 24 November 2010,) and invited him to continue the convening of an open and inclusive process for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue on the Internet Governance Forum according to its mandate as set out in paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda. The Resolution extended the mandate of the IGF for a further five years (2011-2015).



Participation by geographic region



Participant Distribution by Stakeholder Group IGF First Cycle



Participation by stakeholder group

4. The second IGF cycle: 2011-2015

The second IGF cycle held meetings in

- **2011 IGF Nairobi, Kenya**
- **2012 IGF Baku, Azerbaijan**
- **2013 IGF Bali, Indonesia**
- **2014 IGF Istanbul, Turkey**

The last meeting of the second cycle will be held on 10-13 November 2015 in João Pessoa, Brazil. On-site attendance ranged from 1605 in Baku to 2632 in Bali.

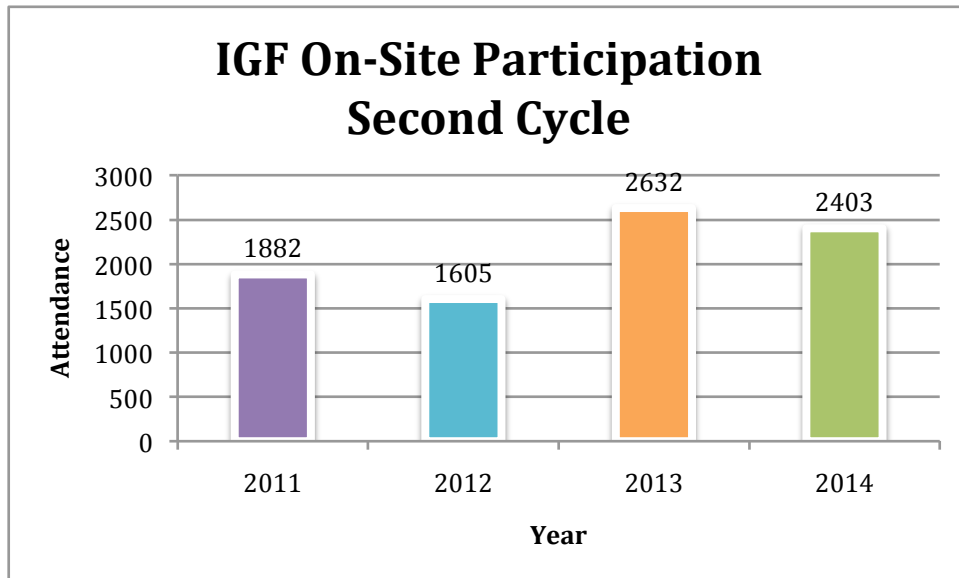
To further enhance the value of the IGF and its Secretariat, the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2010/2 invited the Chair of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development to establish a working group on improvements to the IGF. The report of the working group² was endorsed by the 66th session of the General Assembly and provides guidance for the future work of the IGF and its working methods, preparatory processes and associated project activities, in general and in particular it recommends providing takeaways and more tangible outputs.

The annual meetings are structured in main sessions, workshops and other events. While in Athens there were 36 workshops held in parallel to the main sessions, their number increased steadily over the year, so that the selection of workshop proposals turned into a complicated process managed by the MAG, as not all proposal can be accommodated. In Istanbul, there were 89 workshops and 29 other sessions in parallel to the main sessions.

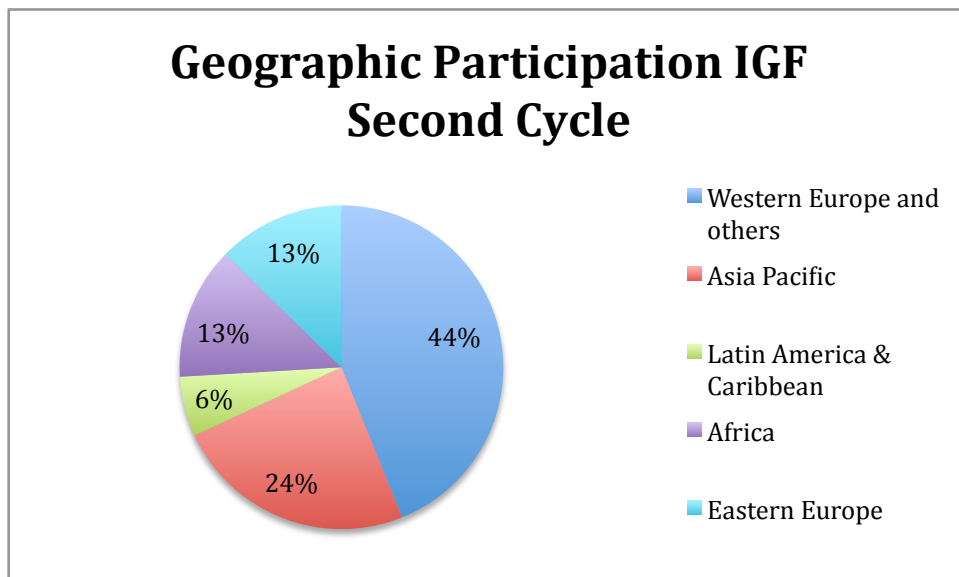
Remote participation improved gradually over the years. The introduction of remote hubs at

²See recommendations by the CSTD Working Group on Improvements to the IGF
http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/a67d65_en.pdf

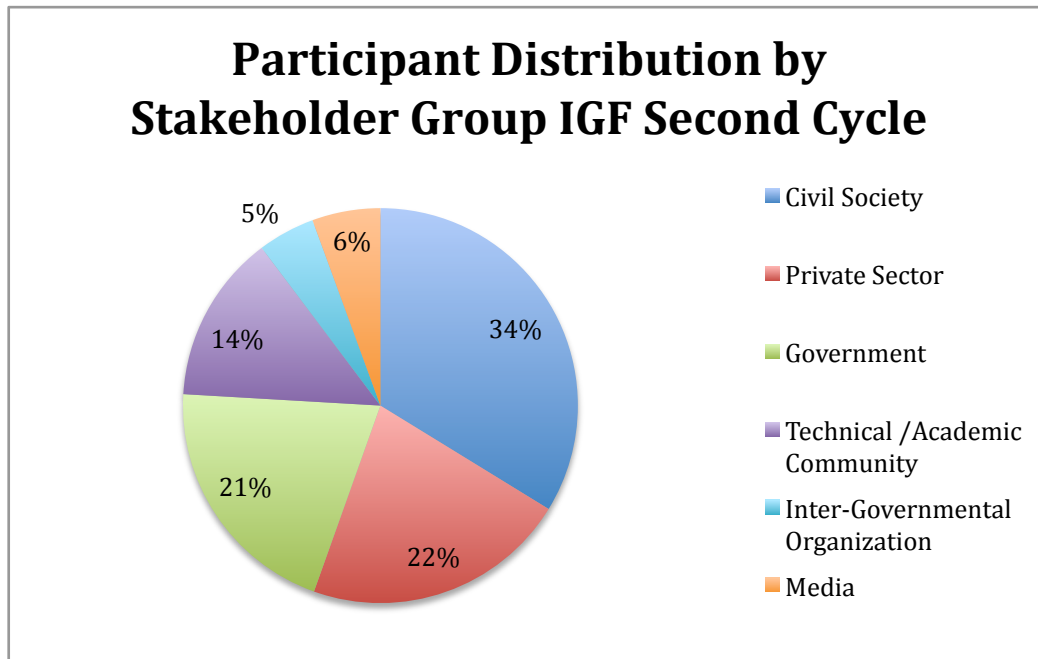
the 2008 meeting in Hyderabad proved to be particularly popular to allow those not on-site to participate in the meetings. More and more local communities organized themselves to join in a remote hub. While in Hyderabad there were 9 registered hubs, their number grew to 52 at the 2014 meeting in Istanbul.



Participation by geographic region



Participation by Stakeholder group



5. Regional and national IGF initiatives

The spread of national and regional IGF initiatives was found by many to be the most important legacy of the first five years of the IGF. While at the beginning, many of these initiatives were conceived as preparatory meeting for the annual IGF, gradually they were also seen as initiatives that had a value in themselves and helped empower local communities.

Since 2006, national and regional IGF type processes have spread to all parts of the world, underscoring the strength of the multistakeholder approach as an agent for empowering local communities and for promoting participatory democratic bottom-up processes.

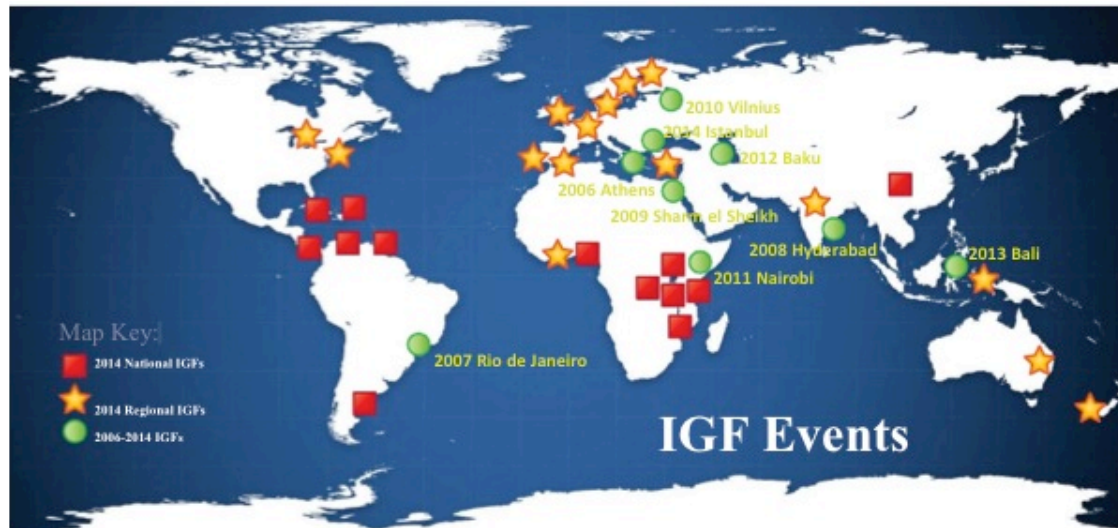
To date, the IGF website lists 12 regional and sub-regional and 21 national IGF initiatives: <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/77-igf-regional-events/igf-regional-and-national/2160-list-of-national-and-regional-igf-initiatives-2015>

They all have their own website and common to all of them is their open and inclusive nature, allowing all stakeholders to participate as equals.

The spread of regional and national IGF meetings has contributed to raising awareness for the IGF, in particular in developing countries where it also contributed to promoting the multistakeholder approach as a new form of participatory democracy. Many commentators felt that the national and regional IGF type initiatives had fostered a dialogue between all stakeholders, government, parliamentarians, private sector, civil society and the technical community. This had changed the nature of Internet governance in those countries and had led to moves toward cooperative models of regulation.

Since 2010, more space has been given to these initiatives to present themselves and to give their input into the major agenda items. An inter-regional dialogue in form of a roundtable gives the organizers of these initiatives the opportunity to discuss among themselves on

how best to improve the linkages with the global IGF. While there was a general agreement that there was merit in this kind of exchange of views and experiences, there was also a feeling that there was no 'one size fits all' approach and that each country and each region had their own priorities and specificities and that, therefore, they should be allowed to develop at their own pace, finding their own format best suited to their needs.



6. Capacity building

The point has been made that dealing with Internet governance issues in a comprehensive way requires multidisciplinary knowledge, as well as a unique blend of diplomatic and technological skills. Developing capacities to actively participate in the global Internet governance discussions and meet the growing challenges at national level represents a significant challenge for all countries, and in particular for small and developing countries.

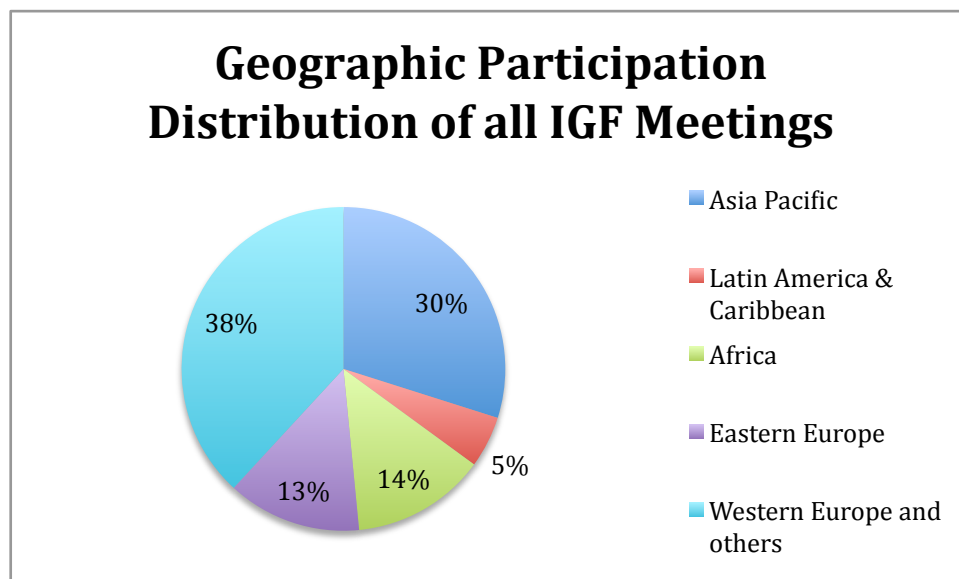
Capacity Building is an important cross-cutting priority of the IGF and well enshrined in its mandate. Paragraph 72 of the *Tunis Agenda* states that the IGF should “...contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries,...”. And Paragraph 72 f) gives the IGF the task to “strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly from developing countries”. One of the main objectives of the IGF therefore is to strengthen capacity of developing country stakeholders to participate effectively in Internet governance arrangements. This was emphasized at all IGF meetings. The IGF to a large extent has without any doubt contributed towards this objective. The discussions held at the annual meetings contributed to a better understanding of how the Internet works and what practices and policies are best suited to help its further development and deployment.

The IGF was also used as a platform by other organizations, such as the DiploFoundation, the Internet Society, and dotAsia, who held their own capacity development activities at the annual meetings. In addition, it allowed key organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) or the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to present their activities and encourage participants to take part in their work, thus facilitating the participation in global governance arrangements.

The IGF Secretariat developed a fellowship programme that created opportunities for young professionals from developing countries to work in Geneva and thus gain first-hand exposure to Internet governance issues and actors and gain experience in the policy debate related to Internet Governance.

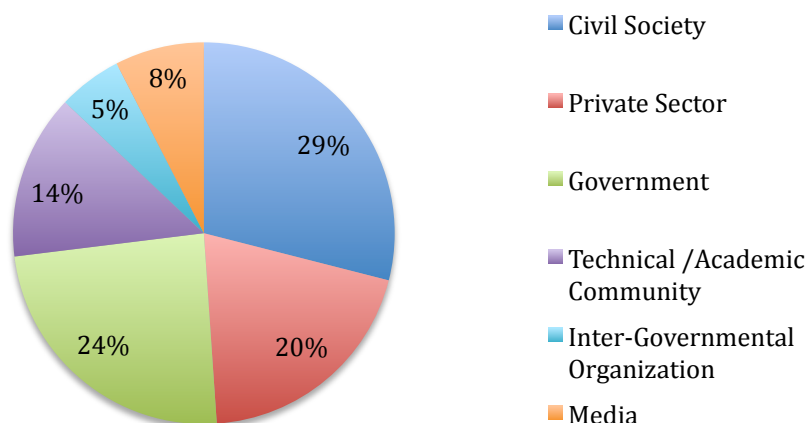
Each fellow benefiting from this programme was sponsored for a period of up to six months each and placed with the IGF Secretariat. Between 2006 and 2015 a total of 15 fellows benefited from this programme. The fellows upon their return to their home destination were able to bring back the skills and knowledge attained and e s, further spreading the IGF's principles and good practices among their home communities. The programme equips fellows with the tools to engage effectively in Internet governance mechanisms. They are now working with their governments and local organizations to create local multistakeholder initiatives, develop policy strategies, and start more capacity building projects.

The selection of candidates from a wide range of countries is also in line with Paragraph 65 of the Tunis Agenda, which underlines the “the need to maximize the participation of developing countries in decisions regarding Internet governance”.³



³ LAC participation figure is expected to raise with the 2015 IGF meeting held in that region

Participant Distribution by Stakeholder Group of all IGF Meetings



7. The Value of the IGF

The main pillar of the Internet governance debate after WSIS is the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). The IGF has the legitimacy derived from its link to the Secretary-General of the United Nations as its convenor and it has the credibility derived from its open and inclusive multistakeholder approach that allows for input of expert opinions on all issues under discussion. Ten years after Tunis, the IGF has become a central space in the constellation of international institutions and processes dealing with Internet related public policy issues. There is a broad recognition that there is a complementarity of functions between the IGF and international organizations and institutions dealing with Internet related policy issues that is seen as beneficial by Intergovernmental Organizations and by Internet institutions alike. In addition, the approach taken within the IGF is always to look at an issue from multiple angles and by all stakeholder groups, whereas most of the existing institutions have a more narrow focus and examine issues through the lens of one specialized group of experts. While at first sight there might be some apparent overlap in terms of substance, there is no such overlap in terms of function and purpose, as the IGF is not a decision-making body. It is more like an incubator for ideas and policy initiatives that will be brought to maturity elsewhere. In this way the IGF prepares and helps shape decisions that are taken by other institutions at national, regional and international levels.

The IGF and all the national and regional IGF initiatives are the foremost multistakeholder venue to familiarize governments with the Internet model. It is also the only place that touches on all the dimensions of Internet governance. The IGF mandate is very broad and allows for discussing almost any policy subject related to Internet governance. It is also clear insofar as it states that the IGF is not a decision-making body.

The IGF's purpose is to provide a platform for a dialogue between the world of governments and the Internet community.⁴ It was in many ways the beginning of a dialogue between

⁴ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his address at the inaugural IGF meeting.

these two different cultures: the private sector and the Internet community with their informal processes and culture of “rough consensus” on the one hand, and the more formal, structured world of governments and intergovernmental organizations on the other hand. In this respect it was a learning process in which both cultures took first steps towards working with each other.

Over time it has evolved to provide an invaluable space for dialogue for all stakeholders. Quite unlike the traditional United Nations processes, the IGF serves to bring people together from various stakeholder groups as equals, but not to make decisions or negotiate. Rather, they discuss, exchange information and share best practices with each other. While the IGF may not have decision-making abilities, it informs and inspires those who do. The forum facilitates a common understanding of how to maximize Internet opportunities, use them for the benefit of all nations and peoples and address risks and challenges that arise.

From Athens to Istanbul, the IGF has continuously evolved and the quality of the dialogue has progressively matured. There has been a progression from generalizations and issue segmentation to closer linkages between the main themes. Discussing security, for instance, without addressing at the same time the Internet’s openness and issues related to freedom of expression would not give the full picture. The IGF has created a sense of community that allowed discussions of challenging issues in an open and frank manner. Part of the value of the multistakeholder approach is both agreeing and disagreeing on various issues and encouraging participants to show respect and listen to each others' arguments, positions and needs.

The lack of decision-making power is not a weakness, but rather the strength of the IGF. The IGF identifies issues that need to be dealt with by the international community and shapes the decisions that will be taken elsewhere. The IGF identifies issues of concern and puts them on the international policy agenda. It informs the decision-makers and shapes the policy-making processes of other institutions and governments.

The IGF was created to provide a space for dialogue to identify problems and explore solutions. In this respect, the IGF has exceeded expectations – it has proved to be a space for discussions that could not have taken place anywhere else. The IGF is continuously evolving and coming into its own. It has proved its worth as a “go to place” where the community gathers to share experiences and exchange information. The IGF at the meetings in Bali and Istanbul facilitated debates on sensitive and highly controversial issues such as government surveillance and network neutrality. By doing so, it proved that it had matured and lived up to the expectations of participants who wanted to voice their concerns and explore ways forward on challenging policy issues. The IGF is now moving towards producing more tangible outcomes, as was suggested by the CSTD Working Group on IGF Improvement.
