The Inaugural Session of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

Athens, 30 October - 2 November 2006

Summing-up by the IGF Secretariat

Format

There were six panel sessions in an innovative format of interactive multi-stakeholder panels with questions and comments from the audience. Remote participants were given the opportunity to take part via blogs, chat rooms, email and text messaging.

One of the moderators called the panel sessions a giant experiment and a giant brainstorming. He also recalled the Secretary-General's comment that the IGF entered unchartered waters in fostering a dialogue among all stakeholders as equals. The innovative format was generally accepted and well received and some commentators called it a true breakthrough in multi-stakeholder cooperation.

A total of 36 workshops were held in parallel to the main sessions. Reports from these workshops will be made available on the IGF Web site.

Setting the Scene

The first session covered a very broad range of issues. The moderator himself recalled that 10 years a similar gathering was mainly attended by engineers and academics from North America and Europe, while this meeting had a much broader participations, both in terms of geography as well as stakeholder groups. One panellist made the remarks that four years ago many people assembled in the meeting room would not have spoken to one another.

The discussion in the first session was very broad and touched on all of the topics that would be covered later in the week. The importance of the multi-stakeholder model was emphasized by many speakers.

Several speakers noted that IGF is not the beginning of this process but the middle of, much has already been achieved in the WSIS process and the IGF must build on that. It was remarked that all stakeholders have roles to play in the IGF. We need to share experiences and perspectives. We need to share best practices.

Many of the speakers remarked on the fact that technology moves at a pace that is difficult for policy to match. Those working in policy areas should be as creative as those who created the technology. There were also many comments that expressed the hope that the IGF would not be a sequence of five meetings held in beautiful locations, but a process where the meetings would serve as checkpoint in that process.

Perhaps most importantly the theme of development was emphasized with several speakers asking what that IGF could do for the billions who do not yet have access.

The main message of this Session was that no single stakeholder could do it alone and therefore we all needed to work on IG issue in development together.

To conclude it was felt that for the IGF to have value we would have to leave Athens with a clear view of how to move forward.

Openness

The Openness session focused on free flow of information and freedom information on the one hand and access to information and knowledge on the other. Much of the discussion was devoted to finding the right balance:

- the balance between freedom of expression and responsible use of this freedom; and
- the balance between protecting copyright and access to knowledge.

Some panellists pointed out that the two themes are linked and that for developing countries issues such as better access to the Internet and access to knowledge is more of a priority. One panellist called the possibilities offered by the Internet to create content "a new form of free speech". He referred to the creative use made of the new medium by young people which under today's legislation can be illegal.

While all panellists emphasized the importance of freedom of expression, two of them reminded the audience that this freedom is not absolute and that freedom of speech is not without limitations and that the Internet is not above the law. Hate speech, for example, is illegal in both the on- and off-line world.

It was generally felt that the Internet has greatly contributed to the spread of free flow of information and freedom of expression. However, it has also created an inbuilt institutional apprehension or fear of new popular empowerment and a curb on freedom of expression. It was remarked that freedom of expression can be under threat in all countries.

This Session addressed different types of freedom, such as freedom from government surveillance or free access and their link to human, social and economic rights.

The Session turned to the role of the private sector and looked at the relationship between market laws and market forces and human rights. In this context, it looked at the responsibility of the private sector. The question was asked whether major corporations should use their bargaining power to promote freedom of expression. It was pointed out that for some companies doing business in a country signified an engagement or bringing persuasion in the form of economic development rather than trying to use some form of market power in order to negotiate and bring about change.

Some pointed out that systems could be used to encroach on rights and repress freedom of expression. Others highlighted that many systems are multipurpose and the same systems can be used for positive purposes, such as the protection of children and, on the whole, the positive aspects of increasing Internet access outweighed the negative ones. For instance, the use of the Internet increases transparency and this is a value in itself.

The Session also looked at the relationship between national regulation on freedom of expression and the borderless Internet.

As its second main theme, the Session examined the balance between openness and protecting copyrights, the balance between the citizen's right to information and rights of the copyright holders.

There was a recognition of different treatment for materials created by using public finance and those created with private financing and of different business models. Some business models require copyright fee in order to continue production.

Some speakers called on governments to enable free access of information on the Internet. They drew a parallel to libraries: governments bought books for citizen to allow them to gain access to information and knowledge. Should governments do the same with the Internet and remunerate the creators and owners of content?

The Session discussed various questions with regard to the effect of businesses protecting their copyrights and battling piracy. Among these questions were the following: Should copyright protection take into account different cultural traditions, given oral cultures and different notions of knowledge? Was there a need to find business models that work with open information, software and standards?

Security

There was a generally held view that the growing significance of the Internet in economic and social activities raised continuing and complex security issues. One of the key issues here is the way in which responses to growing security threats are dependent on the implementation of processes of *authentication and identification*.

Such processes can only be effective where there is a trusted third party that can guarantee both authentication and identification. This raised a debate about who could effectively act as a trusted third party, the state or the private sector. There was also a debate as to whether a 'bottom-up' model centred on the role of users was more effective than a 'top down' model driven by formal government actions.

It was widely accepted that the perpetrators of security breaches are 'intelligent adversaries' constantly adapting their behaviour to advances in security technologies and processes. There was a shared view that insufficient attention was being given to proactive and long term actions to reduce security threats. There was a broad convergence of views on the need for co-operation at an international level. However, it was pointed out that one of the main obstacles to finding solutions was the lack of agreement at a very detailed level of what a security threat is and who are the key stakeholders.

There was a widely held view that the best approach to resolving security issues is based on 'best practises' and multi-stakeholder co-operation in an international context. However, there was concern about the degree to which information was shared in a timely manner and in a common format (particularly with developing countries). At the same time concern was expressed about the extent to which information and exchange was being achieved in a fully inclusive manner. The role of users and the opportunity to exploit the 'intelligent edge of the network' was highlighted by many speakers.

For some, the role of users had been undervalued in the implementation of enhanced security measures. Not only were better educational measures required -- user choice should be respected more clearly. Thus for example, the setting of clear expectations and principles, within a public policy framework, could enhance the power of consumers to address security measures.

It was generally felt that security is a multi-faceted issue and therefore it was necessary to involve co-ordination between different policy communities and actors. For some this co-ordination needs to include a clear legal framework within which to operate; one example cited was the Council of Europe's Convention on Cyber crime. However others raised the issue of jurisdiction and the particular need for inter-governmental co-ordination.

There was a debate as to whether market based solutions, which stimulate innovation, or a public goods model would deliver better security measures across the Internet. For some, the public goods approach offered the opportunity for the widespread adoption of best practice across all countries. A counter view was that innovative solutions were required at that these could only be provided by market based activities. There was a wide ranging, but inconclusive debate about the role of open standards in shaping security solutions. The debate focused on the appropriateness of the open standards in the security arena. One of the key questions here was the extent to which free and open source software/standards would enhance the level of security for all users

compared to market based licences for proprietary technology.

There was a widely shared view that the IGF could play a significant and positive role in fostering greater debate and action with regard to security on the Internet. The role of the IGF in collating best practices, ensuring the widespread dissemination of information and breaking down 'silo' approaches to the problem were all highlighted. The ability of the IGF to support the development of a common language in the policy debate was seen as very significant.

Diversity

The panellists' views on diversity in the Internet varied, but there was strong agreement that the multilingualism is a driving requirement for diversity in the Internet. One participant said: like biodiversity is to nature, diversity on the Internet must reflect, and does reflect, the whole spectrum of human endeavor, both past and future. The event was not about the 'digital divide', but rather about the 'linguistic divide'.

There was also recognition that diversity extended beyond linguistic diversity to cover populations challenged by lack of literacy in the dominating language or by disability. Audiovisual communication was one of the other forms of communication mentioned in this context. There was also a discussion of media for people with visual and other disabilities. Another theme that was mentioned involved use of the Internet to relieve and someday eradicate illiteracy. The discussion also touched upon the value of audio-visual applications available on the Net especially in communities where cultures were not recorded in a written language.

The meeting guided the participants though a very complex set of distinctions in subjects covered by diversity. It was generally recognized that the WSIS outcome had put the issue of multilingualism on the agenda of international cooperation: there was a right to a multilingual Internet that preserved and enabled the diversity of cultures, including indigenous cultures. A number of panelists highlighted the many success stories about diversity, while also drawing attention to areas where improvements were needed in that regard.

A representative from UNESCO drew attention to the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity mentioning that its purpose was to support the expressions of culture and identity through the diversity of languages.

Multilingual and local content were widely seen as necessary to bring all people into the Internet. When talking about local content a distinction was made between international content that is translated for local languages and content developed locally. There are issues with both:
- For translated content, there are royalty or copyright fees as well as import fees.
- For truly local content there are sometimes difficulties with finding the way to express that content. There is also a need to protect that content.
There was also recognition of the importance of content that supports those who are not literate and those who are not illiterate in the dominant language.

Participants raised the issue of software, pointing out that market forces were sometimes not strong enough to provide countries with software in the languages they required.

During the discussion on internationalized domain names (IDNs), it was generally felt that internationalizing these domain names without endangering the stability and security of the Internet remained one of the biggest challenges. Part of the discussion related to the technical details of IDNs. The discussion included: an explanation of unicode character sets and how language communities need to be involved in making decisions about the code-points. The Session also looked at the work being done in the technical bodies on improving IDN and on testing IDN in the root zone file.

There was general understanding that the support of IDNs involved more than the DNS. Noted as a positive development by participants was that all browsers now supported internationalized domain names.

There was also a discussion on the possible follow-up to the meeting.
- One suggestion is to establish multistakeholder cooperation between the various institutions dealing with these issues, such as UNESCO, ITU, ICANN and ISOC/IETF, to come up with solutions
- Another suggestion related to support of multilingual content that is not commercially viable. Many techniques were suggested and may be explored in initiatives emerging from the Athens meeting.

Access

The debate brought into focus the universal acceptance that increasing access remains one of the great challenges facing the Internet community. The nature of digital divide was seen as being multifaceted and a focal point for public policy responses. A wider range of policy initiatives were discussed but a strong theme was that the introduction of competition and the removal of blocks to competition were of fundamental importance. It was recognized that Africa faced particularly complex problems with regard to access to ICT resources.

It was also stressed by many speakers that the issue of access was not solved by a specific and narrow focus on telecommunications sector reform. However, it was recognised that telecommunications sector reform was a necessary condition to establish the appropriate framework for increasing access. Key issues highlighted in the debate over telecommunications sector reform included:
- Independence and transparency;
- Removal of monopolies and the licensing of new players;
- Competition as a key issue (and what are the barriers to competition);
- The need to establish interconnection regimes that reinforce the competitive market;
- The need to develop innovative policy measures such as universal access regimes (through for example reverse auctions) to harness market based solutions to structural issues.

For some the emphasis was not on the detail of regulatory frameworks but on the need to establish market structures which would stimulate investment, especially from local capital and the construction of local solutions, such as peer-to-peer interconnection arrangements through local Internet Exchange Points (IXPs). It was also observed that increased local based activity would increase reliability and integrity of the network; several examples from Kenya and Senegal were quoted how local IXPs and local routing enhanced Internet connectivity, access and reliability.

The comment was made that it was important not to simply import regulatory frameworks from OECD countries but to focus on frameworks that were tailored to local conditions. Hence, it was stressed the need in many countries is not local loop unbundling but the building of local loops and ensuring adequate power supplies.

The issue of interoperability and adaptability was debated. Likewise it was widely recognized that open standards are critical to underpinning greater access for all communities. It was stressed that open standards are, for example, critical in allowing those with disabilities to reformat material into more accessible format.

The role of enhanced capacity building was discussed extensively. In the debate, the issue was not just focused on the needs of policy makers but in enhancing the level of ICT skills within a country. The debate reinforced the key messages of the Tunis Agenda. For some, the investment in ICT capacity building within an information society is tantamount to the investment in basic training and education; without such an investment the issues of access can never be addressed.

There was a broad convergence of views that the most appropriate level to address issues of access was the national level, as most policy development and implementation is at the national level. This debate focused on the role of governments as the key stakeholders in ensuring an enabling environment for greater access. The debate highlighted the role of governments as the single largest customers in any one country and the stakeholders with the ability to link across many policy debates, such as the provision of other infrastructure services like electricity or access to other government services (for example, healthcare and education). Linking policy debates and creating enabling environments was seen as critical for increasing access to the Internet.

There was some discussion on the role of new emerging wireless technologies in providing increased access. It was widely expected that wireless technologies could change the access market landscape. But for this change in the landscape to become a reality some of the appropriate spectrum regulatory and wireless technology standards issues need to be addressed.

Many speakers raised the topic of rural access and the problems associated with it. It was emphasized that there is no 'one size fits all' solution but knowing the 'best practice' cases would help increasing access in rural areas across the world. The debate also focused on the role of government policies in facilitating increasing access in rural areas, for example encouraging investment or the government playing a role of a key enabler.

The speakers also emphasized the issue of affordability from two perspectives: end user and carriers' perspective. Some participants noted the significant decreases in costs of international connectivity. Others observed continuing high costs on some routes.

The significance of the IGF as an international initiative to put on the table the multi-stakeholder debates surrounding issues of access and the digital divide was recognized. The ability of the IGF to exchange best practices in promotion of access between various stakeholders should help address the issues of inequalities of access.

Emerging Issues

The panel format included video link-ups with remote participants at locations in Chile, Mexico and Peru.

It was apparent that to young people the Internet is a way of life. One of the concerns that ran though the entire session was the sense of a growing Digital Divide.   Since youth in developing countries have to pay many times more for access then their peers in developed countries, they are not able to make the Internet part of their lives in the same way that those on the panel and in developed world. This is seen as one of the causes of the growing divide.

Access, according to several of the panelists should be a fundamental human right because without access the young cannot grow up to truly live in the modern world. There were also participants who disagreed with the statement that access was a right and who argued that access was something that needed to be gained through individual effort. One speaker stressed the point that: "... we can't take the passive voice here. It's something that we have to do, not something that we can be given."

Many participants talked about developing the skills to use the network to create local content and local advantage. The ability to use the Internet and the ability to create content was seen by many participants as being essential for freedom of expression and a new category of e-citizenship.

Another issue discussed by several participants involved the inclusion of youth in Internet governance, especially in areas dealing with the safety of the Internet for young people. For

example, youth have formed grass roots organizations in Africa to campaign for safer use of the Internet. The hope was that the IGF would enable youth to get more involved.

Many of the participants took up the theme of what they called 'access to access' as the most important and immediate need. By 'access to access' the participants meant that the problem is not about technical details, but about economy and capacity. It was the opinion of many participants that 'access to access' should be the driving theme for the Rio meeting.

One hopeful note was sounded by one of the participants: seeing how quickly the Internet spread to one billion people there is hope that it will spread to the remaining five billion.

Some of the participants pointed to the need for continuing capacity building both in the use of the Internet and in Internet governance. There was an emphasis on the need for financing in order to make capacity building a real possibility. But several noted that it takes more then money, it takes developing a program that allows those who receive the education to have an opportunity to use the education and to take it further.

Several participants also spoke about a gender divide within the digital divide. It was mentioned that frequently access in the developing world had a gender bias insofar as efforts were oriented more towards the boys than girls. This was seen by some participants as an additional problem in that it makes the gender divide worse in places where the digital divide was being alleviated.

While there were many participants who called for the need for more money for development, there were also participants who argued that money was not the main issue, but that there needed to be a symbiotic relationship with business to allow for innovation. The lack of innovation in some developing regions was seen by some as the reason for high access costs. The remedy, for these participants, was for markets to be more open.

Several participants spoke of a need to make intellectual property rights more flexible to allow innovations to continue. Another theme that was discussed concerned the change in education opportunity that the Internet brings. A number of panelists spoke about the way the Internet enables citizens to become educated and aware of some of the conditions that affected their lives. This was seen as a major contribution to strengthening democracy.

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