

Contributions Taking Stock of IGF 2020 and Looking Forward to IGF 2021

Synthesis Paper

This paper summarizes inputs received from the IGF community in response to an [invitation](#)¹ from the IGF Secretariat for stakeholders to submit written contributions taking stock of the IGF 2020 meeting (15th IGF) and looking forward to the IGF 2021 meeting (16th IGF). In addition to asking for feedback on the programme components, the Call also asked stakeholders to reflect on ways the IGF could be strengthened within its mandate, but also in line with the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. The synthesis also reflects advice for improvements stakeholders expressed during the open mic feedback [session](#)² at the IGF 2020.

This synthesis paper is intended to form input for the third meeting of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) (9 February 2021) in the preparatory process for IGF 2021. This paper is a summary of the fifty (50) [contributions](#)³ received by the IGF Secretariat, as well as inputs received during the mentioned open mic feedback session. Some specific suggestions are included verbatim. A complete list of contributions received can be found at the IGF website and is annexed to this document (Annex 1). The biggest number of contributions came from Africa, followed by countries from Western Europe and Others Group, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern Europe. Several stakeholders identified as members of intergovernmental or international organizations. Civil Society stakeholder group submitted the biggest number of inputs, followed by the Technical Community, Private Sector and Intergovernmental Organizations. Also, annexed is the output document of the IGF 2020 MAG Working Group on Strengthening and Strategy that will inform the MAG's deliberations during the meeting in February (Annex 2).

The synthesis document outlines feedback submitted on IGF 2020 processes and suggestions for improvements of IGF 2021 processes, structured around the following IGF process components:

- *Preparatory Process*
- *Intersessional work and NRIs*
- *Annual Meeting: design, structure and programme*
- *Participation and stakeholder engagement*
- *Communications and technical matters*

¹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/taking-stock-of-igf-2020-and-suggesting-improvements-for-igf-2021>

² <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-2020-open-mic-and-feedback-session>

³ <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/igf-2021-suggestions>

I Preparatory Process

There was a broad recognition of the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic posed for the organisation of the IGF as a completely online process. In this context, stakeholders praised its quick transformation to a completely online annual meeting and the adjustment of the planning process format to it. Overall, deep appreciation was expressed for the IGF 2020 preparatory process.

1. Particularly, some underlined that the IGF 2020 process created stronger linkages with the community through introducing more communication mechanisms, such as the newsletter, webinars, online open meetings and mailing lists.
2. The timely issued Call for Thematic Inputs was also praised by many as an effective way to ensure the development of the process in a bottom-up manner. Some underlined the need for the continuation of this practice, to adopt a more consistent-driven approach to the programme development. This would further inform and shape the selection process of workshops. Further, it was stated that the IGF 2021 should continue addressing emerging and urgent issues, giving as an example the environmental track in 2020. On this particular track, the next IGF's host city, Katowice, is regarded as an opportunity to further place the interrelation between digitalization and climate change, given that it hosted the global Climate Change Conference.
3. There was one input that noted minimal engagement in the environmental track, noting that other matters, such as the digital economy, were left out despite its high global priority.
4. One input noted the lack of clarity on how the thematic tracks were decided on and called for more transparency in this regard. Further, this input called for not limiting the session proposers to fit the 'thematic baskets' in case they have other pressing matters of relevance to address. It was also noted that an abridged call for lightning talks is re-introduced, to ensure formats for addressing top emerging issues that may arise after the call for sessions closes.
5. For the IGF 2021, some suggested to ensure an early announcement of the IGF 2021 calendar of events/important dates, to help stakeholders better organize. This also includes publishing the dates of the MAG meetings well in advance.
6. There were some suggestions for the Call for workshops to include a mandatory requirement the need to ensure youth inclusion.
7. There was some advice to avoid merging the selected workshop proposal on a similar subject matter and, instead, to ask the proposers to further narrow down the focus to make a clearer distinction between the two.
8. The preparatory process should also inform about the purpose of the main session, according to one input, adding that the IGF 2020 main session focused on trust could be a good case example for the MAG's future guidance on developing the future main sessions.
9. It would be beneficial if the preparatory process would also inform the ways networking sessions are organized, as their implementation created confusion on the procedures to apply for one. Also, their focus is seen as unclear, since some turned to be 'mini-workshops'.
10. One input called for better facilitation of inputs into the planning process from UN agencies.
11. The cooperating between the former, current and future host countries was called to be continued throughout the preparatory process.

II Intersessional Work and NRIs

Several inputs addressed the concept of the intersessional work, namely the Best Practice Forums (BPF), Dynamic Coalitions (DCs) and also the national, regional, subregional and youth IGF initiatives (NRIs). Stakeholders remarked that the intersessional work was carried out in a timely manner. Some underlined the important outputs both the BPF and DC produced through a bottom-up, consultative process, marking them as valuable contributions to IG discussions.

12. For the IGF 2021, it was called for a strengthening of cooperation between the intersessional work and the NRIs, as well as with other global processes and initiatives. As a case of good practice, it was reflected in the BPF Cybersecurity's cooperation with the Open-Ended Working Group and Group of Governmental Experts. Advancing the intersessional work outputs could be also achieved by having them focused on politically relevant topics and connecting them to the decision-making levels. In this respect, some particularly welcomed the newly announced intersessional work project focused on the environment, "Policy Network on Environment and Digitalization".
13. Some suggested that evidence-based research could be conducted for the intersessional workstreams to foster better linkages with other Internet governance processes and decision-making processes. It was further added that the DCs and BPFs have the enormous potential to be transformed into policy incubators and nurture debates, agendas and policy developments happening in other fora.
14. Some advised to strengthen connections between the intersessional work streams and the annual meeting's main and high-level sessions.
15. The global IGF could also consider hosting an "intersessional global IGF" which might serve the purpose of accommodating a larger number of discussion topics, whose outcomes could inform the annual IGF meeting hosted over fewer days with a sharper thematic focus.

Several specific suggestions for improvement of work of the Dynamic Coalitions came through a joint submission of the DC Coordination Group (DCCG), but also other stakeholders, summarised below.

16. The DC Coordination Group (DCCG) specifically called for the IGF Secretariat's continuous support of the DC's work by a dedicated focal point, such as the one the BPFs or NRIs are receiving. Further, it was called for better visual display of the DCs on the IGF website with the possibility of access for coordinators, as well as promotion on the IGF's social media.
17. DC-produced outputs would benefit from more strategic support through coordinated dissemination across the IGF ecosystem by the IGF Secretariat, IGF MAG and IGF's networks of contacts and social media.
18. Stakeholders called for the development of more effective cooperative mechanisms between Best Practice Forums and DCs focused on similar Internet governance matters. Similarly, it would be beneficial to develop meaningful cooperative mechanisms between DCs and NRIs. For example, DC could benefit from inputs from NRIs; while DC expertise can enrich NRIs discussions. Having an NRIs calendar of events well in advance would be helpful for DCs to organize their participation in these events.
19. The DCCG stressed that their bottom-up annual collective work on preparing and hosting the main session, individual sessions and a coordination session in the framework of the IGF 2020 worked well and called for a continuation of this practice at the IGF 2021. The DCCG saw these sessions as much helpful for rising DCs visibility and informing the global community and called for DCs to create more work objectives achieved through collective work monthly, not only at an annual basis. One suggestion proposed expanding the duration of the DC's main session from 120 to 180 minutes. There was a concrete suggestion for the DCs to host an orientation session for newcomers at the margins of the annual IGF meeting.

Regarding the national, regional, subregional and youth IGF initiatives (NRIs), the majority of stakeholders supported forging linkages between these networks and the IGF. Specific inputs on the NRIs are summarised below.

20. Some inputs called for announcing the NRIs calendar of events in advance for better preparation of those interested in this work. Given a large number of the NRIs, there was a suggestion for encouraging a cross-national/cross-regional IGF, based on common priorities in digital policy issues, that could result in establishing better linkages among the NRIs themselves. This could support establishing of inter-regional IGFs dialogues.
21. Stakeholders expressed to be satisfied with the ways the NRIs were integrated into the IGF 2020 processes, including its annual meeting through the main session and collaborative sessions. It was called for the continuation of the Secretariat's facilitation of the NRIs collective work in a bottom-up manner, respecting the autonomy of the NRIs.
22. One input called for more transparency regarding the delegation of NRIs representatives as speakers at the NRIs main session. Another one called for better engagement of Youth IGF initiatives in the NRIs sessions.

III Annual Meeting Structure, Design and Content

23. Stakeholders remarked on the IGF 2020 well reflected momentum in which the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the global population, through its main theme and the meeting discussions.
24. While many of the submissions remarked on the success of a fully online meeting, especially within a tight timeline, some underlined that the meeting's duration was too long. It was called for a clearer distinction of pre-events that do not go through formal evaluation processes as other sessions. It was suggested that the IGF in-person meeting keeps its traditional format of 1 pre-event day + 4 meeting days.
25. Regarding the overall programme, some remarked that among the total number of all sessions, duplication of thematic subject focuses was observed.
26. For IGF 2021, stakeholders suggested a more concise and coherent programme with fewer parallel tracks, focused on a limited number of strategic issues. To achieve this, it was suggested to reduce the number of sessions to avoid duplications of content. There was a suggestion for the IGF to address up to three focused policy issues or questions. Another suggested concrete way to achieve this could be by asking two more questions in the call for session proposals: (i) What question would you like answered? and (ii) What challenge would you like to receive recommendations towards a solution for?.
27. Given the recommendation for reducing sessions by many, there were suggestions for the IGF to create a complementary space on the margins of the 16th IGF for addressing other issues of priority.
28. There was one suggestion to have the intersessional work sessions scheduled as pre-events, to unburden the programme and allow for more space for the community-led sessions.
29. A number of stakeholders praised the structural innovations introduced, such as the high-level leaders track and the parliamentary roundtable and called for these practices' continuation in 2021. However, one output cautioned against the creation of separate tracks for one single stakeholder group, as it goes against the established and mandated structure of the IGF.
30. To better support the engagement of parliaments and governments, there was a suggestion to allow side events specifically for these groups to interconnect at the IGF's annual meeting. Further, it was said that the parliamentary track could progress to a format which might be called "IGF meets Parliament" by a participation design that seats parliamentarians together with the IGF stakeholders.
31. Expansion of substantive focus toward including Internet governance matters related to the environment was also praised by many.

32. The meeting's multiple outputs were seen as relevant, as they put out the need for global response and coordinated efforts to deal with a various crisis that is felt and translated to the online space as a continuum of the offline determinants. However, some stakeholders called for advancing these through a more systematic and better-structured manner. For example, some noted that it was confusing to see multiple messages produced, such as the one emerged from the thematic track, high-level leaders' track and main sessions, in addition to the key-takeaways and session recommendations. Fewer, cleared outputs could be easier to digest, as advised by some. The IGF 2021 could further develop a strategic plan to have these outputs feed into other discussion and decision-making processes.
33. It was called for advancing the information sources available prior to the meeting, such for example daily reports or policy summaries. Some advised seeking for partnership in this effort such for example with the Geneva Internet Platform, GIPO Internet governance schools etc.
34. Stakeholders agree that the IGF 2021 programme should be action-oriented, to allow for an exchange of ideas on concrete, implementable solutions for particular problems. In this regard, they welcomed the newly introduced Call for Voluntary Commitments and called for its further development.
35. Given the goal of the IGF to treat online participants equally as the onsite ones, improvements should be made to the participating online platform in terms of simplified access, while maintaining security and safety levels of caution. Further, as the pandemic showcased that the online held meetings can be effective, the IGF could think of adopting the hybrid approach as constant for all future meetings. This format needs to be advanced, and the starting point would be to gather best practices and understand which models are among the most effective ones. It is particular, it was advised to ensure the best utilisation of the chat function. This aspect was seen as neglected in 2020, despite in some cases discussions leading toward useful inputs, tangible outcomes and action-oriented ideas.
36. The IGF Village, as an integral part of the IGF's annual meeting, was referenced as a traditional important meeting point by many. However, some said that during the online 15th IGF, the Village was challenged by many factors impacting the logistics, participation and overall interaction between booth organizers and participants.
37. One input suggested that the IGF 2021 allows for informal spaces for presenting or demonstrating non-commercial Internet governance pilot projects, as well as to have a space a dedicated space where publications available for public consultations could be displayed.
38. Stakeholders also commented on the pre-events, noting as positive the opportunity for participants to meet the MAG, calling for more efforts to 'demystify' the MAG and the preparatory process.
39. Several inputs called for improving the session's format to support more interactivity and especially allocate more time for exchanges with other participants, instead of merely among speakers.

IV Participation

There was a broad recognition of the record participation of the IGF's annual meeting, some outlining that particularly enriched diversity was seen among the global south participants, NRIs, youth and parliamentarians. A positive note was also given to a good stakeholder and gender balance among participants. Improvements for IGF 2021 were suggested.

Many inputs welcomed as positive improvements giving more attention to youth inclusion in the overall IGF 2020 process. Building on those foundations, the IGF 2021 and beyond could foster meaningful

integration of young people in the programme in a way that young people, as future experts and leaders, are an integral part of the IGF 2021 discussions. In this regard, possible concrete actions to be taken in 2021 could be:

40. Building a database for youth, searchable by age, region, country, background and Internet governance issues of interest to support intersessional work and annual meeting exchanges to reach out to youth.
41. Capacity development activities for youth such as webinars, publications, etc. on critical Internet governance (IG) topics. It was further called for the cooperation of the IGF Secretariat and the MAG with other global initiatives on jointly supporting capacity development initiatives for youth.
42. Session organizers could be encouraged to involve youth as resource persons in their sessions, to ensure that their voices are present in a wide range of discussions affecting them.
43. The IGF Youth DC coordinates with other DCs to ensure younger participants are made aware of the opportunities to contribute their knowledge and insights to the specific work in the DCs.

To support the engagement of parliaments in the IGF 2021 processes, including the annual meeting, there were a few concrete suggestions shared.

44. The DC coordination group noted this group's potential to support the engagement of members of parliaments (MPs) into the IGF processes, by having DC experts informing the MPs about the critical matters on Internet governance through liaison's function of the IGF Secretariat.
45. An input suggested the establishment of a dedicated observatory to help understand which parliaments need support, including knowledge of specific questions from and/or expertise of individual parliamentarians and which DCs hold particular expertise. A possibility for DCs and MPs to meet within the IGF framework could be explored.

Stakeholder broadly called for maintaining and further developing strategic efforts for engagement of high-level leaders and experts from all stakeholder groups.

46. There was a recognition of the increase of high-level participants, not traditionally present at the IGF.
47. Some noted that the IGF 2020 saw a decrease in high-level political presence, with only one head of State, presented through a video message. Similarly, the leadership from the private sector at the CEO level, was low. The IGF 2021 should explore ways to ensure more heads of states and governments, as well as private sector outlets, take active in-person participation.
48. It was called for the continuation as permanent practice the personal participation of the IN Secretary-General, as well as of the Host Country President or Head of Government, since this practice strengthens the profile and visibility of the IGF and its outcomes.

Stakeholder also advised that the IGF 2021 strategic stakeholder engagement strategy also focuses on a meaningful inclusion of women and the elderly population, as well as communities from historically unrepresented countries and people with disabilities. On the latter, it was noted that some sessions at the IGF 2020 experienced sound malfunction and that the IGF 2021 could benefit from a sign language interpretation. Further, it was called for a strengthening of synergies between IGF and existing observatories and helpdesks, such for example are the Geneva Internet Platform and GIPO. The IGF Secretariat could maintain a dedicated website to this activity. Finally, the IGF, through the Secretariat's placement in international Geneva, could focus on engagement with governments and international organisations placed in this city.

V Communications and Technical Improvements

49. Stakeholders shared that the registration to access the programme session was burdensome and called for a simplified process for IGF 2021. Because of this complexity, some preferred to live stream the sessions, rather than to register and access it via a platform, which probably impacted the session's active participation.
50. Advice was shared to explore alternative online platforms for the IGF 2021, as the Zoom platform faces restrictions in some countries.
51. Stakeholders welcomed a practice of establishing a dedicated website for the annual meeting, as it helped to navigate pertaining information. The schedule design was also recognised by some as helpful for the participant's organisation. This especially relates to the feature of building a personal schedule, which should be kept for IGF 2021.
52. Having all sessions live-streamed, transcribed with the webcast, as well as some interpreted to the six UN languages for some, was also underlined as important by some stakeholders. There was a suggestion to have the session recordings on YouTube linked to the webpage with the session's reports and transcripts.
53. Several inputs called for a robust communication strategy for IGF 2021, to support, among other things, the dissemination of the IGF process' outcomes.
54. Some stakeholders remarked on low media coverage of the annual meeting. Further, good efforts were seen regarding the social media campaign. However, the impact is seen to be modest, as institutions and prominent speakers were not linked in the posts which resulted in a poor number of references from other accounts (e.g. retweets and shares).
55. It was also said that using the 'webinar' format of Zoom caused for sessions to be less interactive. Some felt that it was unfortunate not to be able to see which participants are in the meeting room.
56. The main IGF website, according to one stakeholder, needs improvements, as its design and standards create challenges for community members to utilize it.
57. The resource person list could benefit from more exposure on the IGF website. For example, the session submission form could include a reference and a suggestion for session organizers to explore it.
58. There was a suggestion for the session organisers to create briefing materials on their session's concepts for the participant's better preparations.
59. Advice was also shared for the IGF to issue certificates to stakeholders that took active participation at its annual meeting.

VI IGF Improvements

Several stakeholders provided reflections on the IGF improvements, in line with its mandate and reflecting to the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation.

60. On stakeholder elaborated on the need for the IGF to evolve from one annual event toward a year-round platform focused on a continuous collection of inputs on Internet governance and addressing them through a multistakeholder effort. Specifically, it was explained that there could be about three to four occasions for discussions in a leadup to the final annual meeting. Given that the intersessional workstreams, such as BPFs and DCs, as well as the NRIs, conduct work throughout the year, this suggestion's implementation could successfully build on this profound experience. Further, it was explained that the IGF could act as an Observatory on Internet governance issues, processes and major outcomes, including announcement of the upcoming important events and processes. This function was said to be placed under the strengthen IGF Secretariat's function.

61. One input noted the need for fostering the IGF's closer linkages with the WSIS processes, as well as with the UNGA for the sake of contributing to the thematic open ended working groups of relevance, as well as to institutionally place the IGF under the Office of the UN Secretary-General.
62. There was also a suggestion related to the current operational modality of the MAG's functioning. On input suggested that the activities carried out by the MAG are expanded, through having the group organized in sub-groups with specific set of tasks attached to each.
63. An input noted that the IGF 2020 discussions reflected support for improvements of the IGF as the IGF Plus model in the Roadmap describes. There was a reference to the outcomes of deliberations of the MAG Working Group on IGF Strengthening and Strategy (WG-Strategy) on this subject matter, that developed some proposals that could be relevant for the implementation of a stronger IGF.
64. One input elaborated on its support for the Roadmap's proposed Multistakeholder High-Level Body (MHLB) as an integral part of the IGF's architecture, noting it represents an opportunity for the strengthening of the political relevance of the IGF. Furthermore, an expectation was added of good cooperation between the Office of the Tech Envoy and the IGF, including the MAG and IGF Secretariat. Unlike this input, there was another one that insisted on strengthening the existing architecture of the IGF, including the MAG, instead of establishing any new bodies.
65. Some inputs called for more institutional support from the UN to the IGF. However, another proposal elaborated on the need for the IGF Secretariat to dedicate resources to liaise with relevant organizations within the UN system and outside of it. The current Secretariat format where the preparatory process is led by a recognized figure in the IG community - the MAG Chair – was recognised as efficient that should be continued. Further, it was pointed out that the Forum can build its corporate identity by addressing relevance substantive issues for all.
66. Support was expressed for a light leadership of the IGF Secretariat, referring to past exchanges of donors.
67. One donor to the IGF welcomed the IGF's efforts to develop a fundraising strategy and noted increased interest in supporting the Forum both in-kind and financially. However, concerns were expressed about the lack of transparency related to the IGF's donation processes, as the requests for reporting procedures were said to be neglected.
68. It was underlined that the IGF should continue its processes per its mandate, preservings its multistakeholder nature and particularly in line with the paragraph 72a of the WSIS outcome documents: *Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.*
69. Given that the Roadmap calls for forging linkages between the IGF and NRIs, one input noted that this relationship is already established. Further, it was noted that there is a need to share best practices and ensure that principles of a multistakeholder discussion are followed, with maintaining the richness and variety of ways to organize an event. It was underlined that the agenda-setting for the NRIs must continue to be done in a bottom-up manner. For example, at the European level, comparison of agendas illustrated similarities among the NRIs discussion topics without formal coordination. This could help to identify topics of mutual (voluntarily) to be discussed at the regional level as a first step of discussing them at the global IGF.
70. In terms of funding, the UN should respect NRI independence and not create formal links or provide funding even if the IGF trust fund balance would so allow.

ANNEX 1

- List of received contributions available at https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/igf-2021-suggestions#igf_2021_suggestions-page_2-18

ANNEX 2

- MAG Working Group on IGF Strengthening and Strategy (WG-strategy) proposals on strategic improvements to the IGF and operational measures in 2021, available at https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/filedepot_download/11159/2418