Strengthening cooperation within the context of the IGF: A roadmap for 2018. A summary

By Wout de Natris

In 2017 the MAG requested to receive more information following a Best Practice Forum proposal concerning strengthened cooperation within the context of the IGF. A study was carried out. This summary presents the main findings and recommendations of the report. The input was provided by representatives from all IGF stakeholder communities.

The report focuses on one main question: if the IGF is to facilitate intersessional work and/or working sessions at the conference itself on complex Internet governance issues, aimed at tangible outputs, advise and best practices, what prerequisites need to be met to have a chance at success? The answers present options the IGF has and the decisions to be made to facilitate change.

One recommendation stands above all: provide prioritisation, focus, time constraints and, ideally, pre-defined, desired outcomes. Three recommendations follow from there. They focus on how the MAG can lead by becoming fully informed in order to prioritise and make informed choices. E.g. through: Close cooperation with other, more specialised, Internet Governance organisations; The different stakeholder communities; Continuation of existing work in the previous cycle and; The NRIs. Following the decision for more tangible outcomes more detailed work follows. This will allow a part of the IGF to transform itself into an output driven organisation/conference, by creating circumstances that allow for participation and input and output driven by all stakeholders.

Without the will from the side of the MAG to make decisions that provide the wished for focus and leadership, there is, so most participants agreed upon, no chance at success. Not all participants agreed whether the IGF ever will be able to meet these criteria and a minority advised against going this way. Some doubted the MAG's will towards change. The message here is: Do not lose what the IGF currently is so good at: the multistakeholder dialogue. No one disagrees.

The consequence of not prioritising is a slowly lowering participation from several stakeholder communities as numbers currently already show. On the other and certainly positive hand, there's consensus that the IGF is or could be the organisation where all topics, organisations and experts concerning Internet governance come together. This puts it in a unique position above all other (Internet) organisations. So, if the MAG decides to facilitate strengthened cooperation towards meaningful tangible outcomes, this report presents a more than rough consensus on how it should proceed. The participants' main recommendations are presented below.

Recommendation 1: To have a chance at full participation, thus influence and success where intersessional work and tangible outcomes are concerned, prioritisation and focus, including a time frame have to be provided at the start.

Recommendation 2: If focus on tangible outputs through multistakeholder cooperation becomes a standard, it is critical to determine and facilitate the session and work formats that offer the circumstances that can lead to success

Recommendation 3: For the IGF to become more influential it is necessary for the MAG to connect the dots and search for "over the top" topics in close cooperation with other, more specialised stakeholder communities, e.g. through a liaison system

Recommendation 4: Once decided, the MAG needs to actively stand by and fully commit to the work following its choices by assisting the volunteers at work in all necessary ways

Once these decisions have been made, several others will follow. They are all worked out in detail in the report.