

**Web Foundation Open Forum**  
**Measuring what and how: capturing the effects of the Internet we want**

**5 /9/ 2014**

The forum was put together as a way to start a discussion on practices that are being pursued to measure the effects of the Internet. The Internet is increasingly becoming pervasive in our day-to-day life and is disrupting the way we access, and disseminate information. The Internet is also bringing forward new challenges pertaining to privacy and surveillance related issues. Besides not all citizens have equal opportunities to access and use the Internet. Though the Internet is increasingly being used to leverage services to citizens, policy makers need to ensure that access and participation remain inclusive and that Internet policies address affordable access as a way to reach the poor. The panel brought together discussants and actors who have been active in trying to understand how best to measure the Internet as an ecosystem and capture its effects.

The panel was therefore a good opportunity to start a discussion on what works, what does not work, what types of challenges we are all facing, the types of indicators worth pursuing, how best we can reach policy makers and how best we can improve our outreach efforts and the way we visualize data for increased utility and impacts.

The following speakers participated in the forum:

Stefano De Sabbata, representing the Oxford Internet Institute who has worked on effective use of visualization tools

Alison Gillwald: Research ICT Africa, an African research network which has been quite active in collecting and leveraging both supply and demand side data on ICTs access and use in Africa to support innovative policy and regulations that enable improved access and use

Venancio Massingue, Former Minister of Science and Technology in Mozambique and currently head of SIITRI, an ICT institute in Mozambique

Yacine Khelladi: Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), World Wide Web Foundation

Robert Guerra, the Open Net Initiative who have worked

Ingrid Brudvig: World Wide Web Foundation (Remote Moderator)

Khaled Fourati: World Wide Web Foundation, Moderator

Robert Guerra, Citizens Lab, who has been working extensively on developing appropriate indicators to monitor the Internet

The session discussed the types of measurements and indicators we need to better understand the effects of the Internet or how to make sure that the Internet benefits wider communities. Several actors and development practitioners are keen to better understand what to measure and how to measure. The intention is not to measure and analyze data to inform policy making and practice.

Overall the following questions were addressed:  
Methods of measurements and how to collect data, innovative visualization  
Methods, strategies used to inform policy making.

Specifically the following was discussed:

- We need to better capture the informational divide for improved inclusive policies as it is much bigger than the digital divide
- The importance of capacity building at the local levels to develop expertise on data collection and measurement
- Citizens Lab looked at International security and human rights and developed research tools to determine and better understand censorship and blocking. A network of researchers was able to develop Technical tools and collaboration with users to determine the extent of problem. We also discussed the importance of developing techniques to better understand the advancement of surveillance technologies and methods.
- Research ICTs Africa's experience: There was a gap in local and indigenous knowledge on ICTs. Data from ITU was 2-3 years outdated. Lack of oversight of demand side data. SIM card registration and requirements of biometric and "registered identity" in fact limits and does not increase mobile access. Understanding the reasons for people's marginalization. Usage patterns go beyond access – in terms of gender for example. Gender issues are founded on income and educational marginalization. Radio still remains the most important source of information on the African continent. There is a need to be cautious in the reallocation of spectrum, as those who aren't connected to broadband are then excluded from other sources.
- Social networks use driving Internet use in many developing countries
- Importance to have longitudinal comparison and supply side data as well as demand side data.
- The panel explored the ethics and protocols related to internet blocking and how researchers who want to explore these issues necessarily would have to get access to users' data. Ethics approvals are important and rigorous. Trusted relationships on the ground are important for access. Balance of technical and non-technical staff working together. Retaining staff with particular interests or collaboration with private sector for funding.
- Questions from the audience included some clarifications on the primary users of data. There are several ways to package the collected data for several audiences. Peer review journals and seminars are used to engage with audiences, there are also specific ways to engage through mainstream media.
- The importance of local embedded researchers. The importance of having a clear theory of change.
- The importance of having brief reports that focus on policy change. Need to develop very concise information that get the attention of policy makers
- Use of visualization to effectively communicate with the public.
- How to reduce costs of data collection. Look into strategies to collect data on the Internet rather on the ground.
- Data from operators is lacking. Can cross with demographic profiles to understand users. But there privacy issues that need to be tackled
- Develop the capacity of youth to collect and analyze data
- Tailor the data for specific needs. Test the rigor of the research through an academic paper, then write policy papers, then summarize the main findings in 2 pages.

- Other issues relate to funding data collection, analyses and dissemination. We need to have a better understanding of the political economy of funding. Funding cuts from historically progressive countries has had severe implications. Funding that used to go to researchers and universities is now going to multinational corporations to justify opening new markets. These multinational corporations don't necessarily follow good research methods. The result is poor quality data that inform policy making. Is poor quality of information better than no information?

#### Recommendations:

We need a donor session at the IGF to encourage aligning priorities and research advocacy needs. Donors need to better understand that their research funding is very short and that research to policy change takes time to happen.

The data that is being collected need to be adequately curated to support improved data visualization. It would be important for those who collect and publish data to include ISO 3166-1 alpha-3 and numeric ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO\\_3166-1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_3166-1)), and possibly the FIPS codes ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIPS\\_140-2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FIPS_140-2)). This would speed up the process of comparing data with other data to create visualisations. For example when creating maps, the shape of countries relate to specific codes that can be automatically matched with the collected data. Country names are particularly bad for that, as different datasets use different names for the same country (example: Macedonia, Republic of Macedonia, FYR Macedonia). If the country names are not linked to codes, each user has to manually add the codes, multiplying the number of times needed which may lead to errors. Those who work on ranking countries and indices need to release country tables with codes included.