

IGF 2020 Messages

Data

Version 1: 17 November 2020

Note: this is a living document being put out for public comment. A final version will be published 3 weeks after IGF ends. For any questions or feedback regarding the IGF 2020 Messages, please write to igf@un.org.

Messages related to Overarching Policy Question 1

What policies and concrete actions are needed to ensure that data collection and use can benefit all – including those in developing countries, marginalised communities and the unconnected?

- Artificial intelligence relies on the data sets it is fed. This means that when content is missing from data sets, or actively excluded, it can result in artificial intelligence deepening existing divides, marginalisations and exclusions. In the area of health, particularly, this can have fatal consequences.
- Significant efforts are needed to provide wider, more inclusive data sets and to take active measures to counter bias by those who gather, process and use data.
- "Nothing about me without me". Consent processes for data collection should be strengthened and made more transparent, in particular, for marginalised communities and people in developing countries.
- The concept of data-self determination should be explored as a possible core principle for data governance.

- Internet connectivity isn't just about connecting the remaining billions. It's also about enabling big data and Artificial Intelligence technologies. Artificial intelligence can function offline, but in many circumstances, Internet connectivity is necessary to collect data for processing. With 3 billion people still offline, that is 3 billion people whose needs are not being fully addressed by the opportunities that big data and Artificial Intelligence can contribute to their development and well-being.
- Developing countries with low levels of Internet connectivity and digitalisation are unable to fully benefit from the opportunities that big data, AI and open data can provide. One-off initiatives are not the solution. Instead, long-term strategies need to be developed that connect data strategies to connectivity and digital development strategies.

Messages related to Overarching Policy Question 2

In a world where technology will always develop faster than laws and regulation, what needs to be done to ensure people's rights are protected in regard to the collection and use of their data, from localised misuse of data for surveillance of citizens to international data flows related to increasingly globalised trade and use of online platforms, without undermining the lawful economic and other advantages that data processes can provide to citizens, companies and governments?

- Governments and the private sector - the primary collators of data on individuals - need to ensure that inequalities and marginalisation in the real world are not replicated, and not amplified, by the collection and potential (mis)use of data related to marginalised communities. The inclusion of marginalised communities and minorities in data sets is an important part of improving representation and visibility, but equally, this must not make such communities more vulnerable to adverse actions such as targeted surveillance and restricting access to services available to people considered "mainstream".
- Data localisation is one policy that governments employ to protect their citizens' data from being used in ways contrary to their national laws, if that data were to cross borders. However, that localisation can also have an adverse effect on small to medium businesses and startups who lack the resources to comply with the complexities of such legislation, hampering economic development. Data legislation must, therefore, consider innovative mechanisms that can balance both privacy concerns and the economic and other benefits that can result from the sharing of data across borders.

Messages related to Overarching Policy Question 3

With COVID-19-related expedited policy making on data collection and use successfully meeting immediate policy goals as well as helping mitigate long-term economic fallout, what lessons can be learned from the quickly established coalitions of often silo-based

stakeholders and decision makers who developed and implemented these policies, and how can the innovations in data policies made during the pandemic be applied in other non-pandemic-related contexts?

- Countries that had existing open data policies and standards were able to quickly build on those standards and existing data sharing structures and relationships to quickly develop targeted COVID-19 related data initiatives that respected human rights. Governments without open data policies or standards should consider developing these to not only support quick responses in future times of crisis, but to also democratise and enable evidence-based decision-making in everyday situations.
- The rapid deployment of contact tracing apps during the pandemic has demonstrated that citizens are willing to share their data for the wider public good, as long as they can trust that the information they are sharing is secure, does not collect more information than is necessary, and is not used for purposes other than which it was collected, including long-term surveillance of citizens' movements and activities. While some governments' tracking apps did not always fulfil these requirements, governments and the private sector should endeavour to develop such transparent standards to ensure citizens are willing to participate in data collection processes in future, where such data collection can benefit the wider community.
- Data sovereignty has emerged as a growing trend over the past few years, with a number of countries passing legislation to keep their citizens' data within their national borders. However, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how applying borders to data can have a negative impact on the ability to respond to global challenges.
- Over the past few years, there has been a lively debate about how privately owned online public spaces such as social media platforms should be governed, and whether, and how much, regulation is needed by governments of these spaces and the data that is collected on their users. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that it is possible for private sector entities to work closely with governments, to share data and coordinate on public information campaigns, to support more accurate policy making and empower citizens to make well-informed decisions about their lives. While many of these partnerships between governments and the online platforms were improvised during a time of great need, such relationships could set a good example for future co-governance models of privately owned online public spaces.